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Adventure

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THE LAST SALUTE

By J. D. NEWSOM

IT WAS Withers' fault. He should not have allowed his imagination to run riot over several sheets of notepaper which he had stolen from the company office.

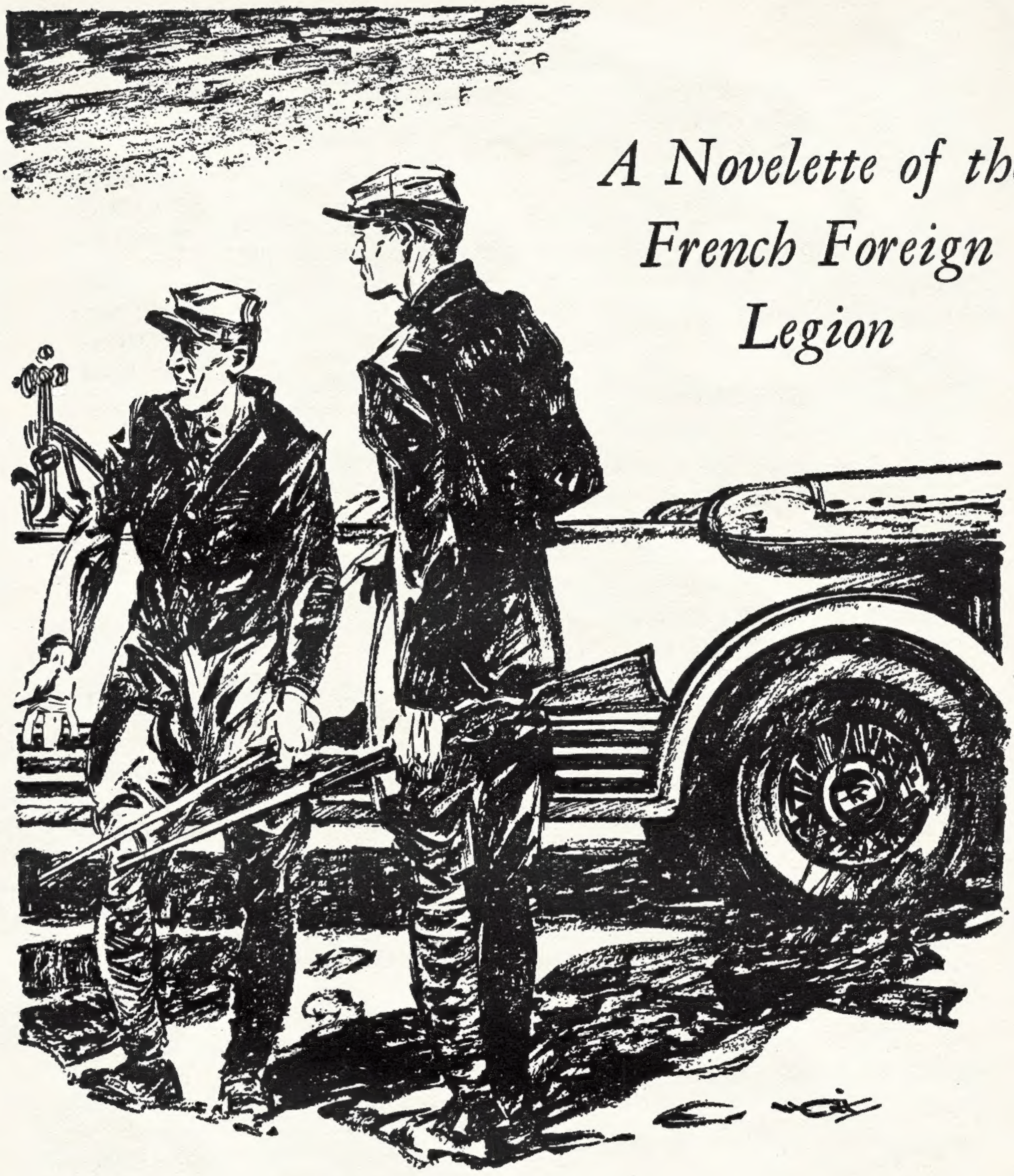
This in itself was bad enough and dangerous enough, but he made matters worse by dragging Curialo into the mess, and Curialo, for once in a way, was almost blameless.

Withers, of course, had no real intention of deserting, although more than once he had flirted with the idea. At one time or another nearly every man serving in the ranks of the French Foreign Legion does wish he could get out of it, but two minutes' careful consideration of the risks involved usually cures most troopers of their longing for freedom.

A deserter does not stand a dog's chance. Military policemen, Arabs and civilians are leagued against him. If they can catch him they receive a fat reward; he goes to prison. In South Morocco, along the fringes of the desert, the water points are guarded and the trails are unceasingly patrolled. There is also the ever present menace of the *djich*, the rebel band, which, if it lays hands on a deserter, will not bother to claim any reward. It will carve him up with considerable skill and leave him to die, spreadeagled and gutted, with a bellyful of stones and prickly pears.

Nevertheless, if by some lucky fluke, after terrible hardships, he struggles out of the desert and reaches the cities of the coast, hawk eyed gendarmes will be looking for him at every railroad station and on every dock. The system works well: not one deserter in a thousand can get clear away.

Now Withers knew these things, and



A Novelette of the French Foreign Legion

he had no desire whatsoever to spend the rest of his days in a military prison camp. His object in writing that letter to his Aunt Martha was twofold—in the first place he wanted sympathy; in the second he wanted cold, hard cash.

Neither money nor sympathy are to be found in large quantities in the Legion. They are, in fact, almost nonexistent. The pay of the rank and file is twenty-five centimes a day, which works out at about one cent in American money. Sympathy is something else again. The average Legionnaire is about the most hard boiled, hard mouthed, hard drinking customer to be found on the face of God's green earth. If he is afflicted with any tender emotions he manages to conceal his feelings with great skill. Whenever he is feeling low he waits until pay day, gets drunk, fights the town patrol, and wakes up, cured, in the guard room.

Withers himself when sober was not noticeably sentimental, and his fondness

for his Aunt Martha was in direct ratio to the size of the postal orders which that long suffering and gullible woman sent him from England.

The names he called her whenever her donations amounted to less than ten shillings were indecent. He could swear in English, French and Arabic, which goes to show that a man may learn a good deal more in the Legion than the mere business of shouldering arms.

Instead of swearing at his aunt, Withers should have been tearfully grateful, for she was the one and only relative of his who still condescended to keep in touch with him. She wrote regularly once a month, gave him news of the happenings in and around the Mile End Road, told him about her boarders and her rheumatism, and never failed to enclose a few shillings pocket money for her wayward nephew.

For several months, however, her gifts had been shrinking more and more. From ten shillings the postal orders had dwindled to eight, from eight to six, from six to five. The tone of her letters showed a corresponding change. She was growing cold and distant, and more than once she bemoaned the fact that a bright young fellow like her nephew Albert should be wasting his life fighting for "them Frenchies." She went even further and hinted that, probably, he had become so French himself that he never would come home.

Justly alarmed by these symptoms, Withers decided to take heroic measures to wring his Aunt Martha's heartstrings and to find once again the way to her purse.

Unfortunately he reached this decision one Sunday morning after he had spent his last sou, and Curialo's last sou, on red canteen wine. They were both feeling mellow and drowsy. Curialo sprawled on a bench with his hands in his pockets, his *képi* dragged down over his eyes, and a cigaret dangling out of the corner of his mouth.

The canteen was almost deserted. An old-timer, resting his head on the table, snored rhythmically. Behind the counter the Widow Clamart dozed over her crochet work. The only living things which displayed any signs of activity were the flies. There were swarms of them everywhere—on the tables, on the ceiling, in the old-timer's beard. The drone of their wings filled the air. Out of doors the parade ground, flayed by the incandescent rays of the sun, was empty and quiet. Fort Hammadi sweltered in the heat.

For awhile Withers kept up a desultory flow of conversation, but no one, least of all Curialo, wanted to listen to him.

"Orlright," he said at last, turning his back upon his neighbor. "Don't talk, if that's the way you feel. Gawd knows I don't care. I got letters to write, I 'ave. 'Ere's a good chawnce ter bring my correspondence up to dyte, as they say, and don't disturb me, yer big galloot, once I get started. It 'ud be just like you—butting in at the wrong momint."

"Who's it to this time?" queried Curialo, speaking sardonically out of the corner of his wide mouth. "Another jane?"

"My Aunt Martha, that's who," declared Withers, drawing a wad of crumpled sheets from his trousers pocket. "She's a blasted, penny pinching 'ound, she is, and no mistake. But I got an idea, matey. You wait. It ought to be worth five pounds, this 'ere idea."

"That's twenty-five bucks, ain't it? I'll tell the world you're a cockeyed optimist, Bert. That old gal—"

"Don't you go saying anything against my Aunt Martha," Withers ordered truculently. "Many's the bottle of wine you've guzzled, thanks to 'er. All she needs now is a little prodding. You watch. I'll prod 'er to a queen's tyste."

He wetted the end of his pencil and settled down to work, elbows spread far apart, his nose nearly touching the paper.

Curilo finished his cigaret and went to sleep. Half an hour later he was aroused by a violent dig in the ribs.

"'Ere," chuckled Withers, his thin face wreathed in smiles. "You listen to this,

matey. This is prime, this is. It's rich. Five quid, I said. Gor'blimey, it's more likely to be ten, maybe more. Fair coining money, she is, the old 'ag. She won't never miss it. This 'ere—" he patted the finished letter— "it's a stroke of genius, as the poet says. Just the sort of thing she loves. Lor', she'll be in tears afore she's through reading it."

By that time Curialo was wide awake and angry. His ribs ached, and the canteen wine had left a dubious taste in his mouth. He was thirsty, but the only liquid refreshment he could look forward to until the next day at noon, when he would draw his half liter ration of wine, was brackish well water.

"And you woke me up to tell me that," he commented, scowling darkly. "I ought to knock you for a loop. You poor nut, that old dame ain't as easy as you think she is. She's wising up."

"But you listen to this," urged Withers, holding up a grimy forefinger. "This is different. It come to me out of the clear blue sky. Hinspiration as you might almost say. Ten pounds—"

"Fifty bucks! What for would she give you fifty bucks?" jeered Curialo. "She knows you spend it on hooch. Why, that's one thousand two hundred and fifty francs. Forget it, Bert. She'll probably send you fifty cents and a letter full of wisecracks. That's her speed."

WITHERS chose to overlook this disparaging comment. He picked up the pages of his letter, sorted them out and, after clearing his throat, he explained:

"It begins like this: 'Dear Aunt Martha—' "

"No," Curialo said firmly. "You don't. I know it by heart. 'Dear Aunt Martha,' " he recited, giving a frightful imitation of the Cockney's sing-song voice. " 'Oping this finds you as it leaves me under shot and shell, surrounded by flying bullets, but not yet wounded, thank God and King George V, though it may happen at any moment—' "

Withers sat bolt upright and thrust out his chin. His round, bulging eyes flashed fire.

"Don't you sneer at my way of writing letters," he cried. "That shot and shell appeal, it's clever that's what it is. But this time—"

"This time you'll shut up. Quit it, Bert. Be reasonable. You ain't got enough money to mail the doggone letter. What's the use of making a song and dance about nothing? It's too hot. Just take things easy."

"Orlright! Strike me blind, if I don't. That's a bawgin, and when the money comes through I'll find somebody else ter tyke out on a spree."

Curialo yawned and closed his eyes. He slumped back against the whitewashed wall.

"Go right to it," he assented. "You're a better man than I am if you can stage a wild party in this dump. Every goldarned joint in Hammadi is out of bounds." He reopened one eye and stared sourly at the Widow Clamart. "That's the only woman in Hammadi we're allowed to look at. And she's a mess. What's the good of money in a place like this? So long, Bert; I'm going to sleep."

Again Withers prodded him in the ribs.

"Women ain't everything," he pointed out. "Now this 'ere letter it's a masterpiece. When you've 'eard it you'll 'ave to admit—"

"I don't want to listen to your letter," roared Curialo, aroused at last to violent action. "I want to sleep. I want to be quiet. You make me sick. The whole army makes me sick." He caught Withers by the scruff of the neck and jammed his head down on to the table. "Eat your damn letter," he shouted. "Chew it, slobber over it, but for the love of Mike, leave me out!"

Withers squirmed violently. Distressing sounds came from the back of his throat.

"Leave off! 'Ere! Blast you! Leave off, I say!"

The disturbance dispelled the Widow Clamart's lethargy.

"*Assez!*" she commanded. "That will do, band of baboons. I will not allow fighting in the canteen. I shall report you to the orderly sergeant. Stop it. You will chip my mugs."

Curialo's ill humor switched abruptly from Withers to the *cantinière.*

"I'd like to break every bottle in the place," he told her. "What do you put in your wine, you ancient witch? Coal tar? Or is it kerosene? My throat's on fire."

A vehement altercation then ensued. Withers, forgetting his grudge against Curialo, shook his fist at Madame Clamart.

"Borgia!" he cried. "Specimen of a poisoner! Who knows how many poor men have died of drinking your wine of the most abominable?"

The gray bearded veteran joined in the fray as a matter of principle, without knowing what it was about. The Widow Clamart was not popular. Her wine was cheap, bad and weak. But she was more than able to take care of herself. Her voice was as shrill as the blast of a calliope; her manner was aggressive. She pitched into her customers with shrewish venom and almost drowned them out.

The row was at its height when a shadow fell across the threshold. Some one beat a tattoo upon the door.

"Attention!" bellowed the orderly sergeant. "*A vos rangs!* Colonel's inspection!"

The angry voices died away. Withers, Curialo, the graybeard and the Widow Clamart leaped to their feet and stood rigid. A great silence filled the room. Only the flies, indifferent to man made laws, buzzed about with unabated ardor.

Into the canteen strolled Colonel Meluche, commanding the Hammadi Garrison, a long, lean, stoop shouldered man with a hatchet face, a rimless monocle and a beautifully curled mustache. Behind him marched the orderly captain with an open notebook in his hand and a worried, expectant look in his eyes. Behind him came the regimental adjutant, a beefy, perspiring man, armed also with a notebook and a pencil. Closing the line of march came the orderly sergeant, bristling with a sense of his own importance.

"Ah, *Monsieur le Colonel,*" simpered the Widow Clamart. "Good day, *Monsieur le Colonel.* I trust *Monsieur le Colonel* is not incommoded by the excessive temperature we are having."

The colonel unclasped his hands, which he held folded behind his back, and touched the vizor of his cap with two fingers.

"Madame—" he bowed—"the weather? This isn't hot. You ought to have been with us in the Hoggar. Eleven—no, twelve years ago." He glanced slowly around the room. "Looks clean in here. Meticulous. Congratulations." Again he brought his monocle to bear on the lady. "I heard a great deal of noise when I came in. Shouting. Have you any complaints to make, Madame Clamart?"

Her eyebrows went up and up until they met her hair. She shook her head and shrugged her shoulders.

A noise as of shouting? Surely *Monsieur le Colonel* must have been mistaken. She never had to make complaints against any of her brave boys. They had hearts of gold. They never gave her the least trouble (she knew which side her bread was buttered on); they were far too considerate ever to quarrel with her.

Of course—here she smiled knowingly—she had been bandying a few words with Messieurs Curialo and Withers just as the colonel arrived. Words of the most amicable—an exchange of opinions about minor matters.

"It sounded like a fight to me," the colonel broke in. "Don't shield them, Madame Clamart. I object to such weakness. I'll drill some decency into their thick skulls."

He turned and glared at the two troopers.

"I will not tolerate this sort of thing," he rasped. "I heard you braying all the way across the parade ground. Hyenas! Apes! Must I put the canteen out of bounds before you learn to behave decently?"

This particular remark did not seem to call for an answer. They stood as though turned to stone, staring past the colonel, as the regulations prescribed, "at an imaginary object at a distance of approximately ten meters."

The colonel looked them over item by item, starting in at their *képis* and working slowly downward. All at once, out of the tail end of his eye, Withers saw that the officer's glance was riveted on the sheets of note paper lying before him on the table. His heart rose up in his throat and choked him. He felt hot, then cold; beads of perspiration rolled down his cheeks; his knees shook. At last, in desperation, he tried to distract the colonel's attention.

"Begging your pardon, *mon Colonel*," he began in a strained voice. "Far from us was the idea of disputing with Madame Clamart! Indeed, I was but asking her for a stamp. I wanted to mail this letter of mine."

As he spoke he tried to gather up the scattered sheets and to palm them out of sight. But the attempt was wholly unsuccessful.

"Har!" exploded the colonel. "Do you always preface your purchase of stamps by such names as Borgia and poisoner? Don't lie to me, species of an infamous cretin. And who gave you permission to write a letter on government stationery? Put that down! Let go that letter! At once!"

Pop eyed, open mouthed, gasping, Withers still clutched at the buff colored sheets.

"Obey the order of your commanding officer!" thundered the adjutant. "Are you deaf? Drop it!"

WITHERS let the pages slither out of his fingers. For a long moment a heavy silence weighed down upon the room, when the colonel snapped:

"How did that government stationery come into your possession? No lies now. I want the truth."

A smile, meant to be ingratiating, but which only managed to be ghastly, struggled across Withers' countenance.

"I found it, *mon Colonel*." He made a vague gesture with his arm. "Blowing about in the courtyard behind the office. Just blowing about."

With the tip ends of his fingers he contrived to brush the sheets off the table on to the floor, out of sight.

The colonel eyed him coldly. Withers tried to look like an honest man with an easy conscience, but the effort was painful to behold. His Adam's apple pumped up and down, and his ears, which were large, turned a bright, flaming red.

"Theft," summed up the colonel. "The stores are being pillaged. Adjutant Flaquard, I shall hold you responsible for this leakage."

The adjutant squared his shoulders and muttered something in his mustache. The look he gave Withers was charged with menace.

"But," the colonel went on, "that is beside the point. I am curious to know what kind of correspondence goes out into the world on our official notepaper. Hand me that letter at once."

"*Mon Colonel*, it is strictly private," Withers blurted out. "It is a letter to a close relative. A confidential missive, *mon Colonel*."

"Adjutant Flaquard," ordered the colonel. "Pick up that letter and hand it to me."

The adjutant did not have to be told twice. Down he plunged beneath the table. He retrieved the scattered sheets, bunched them neatly together and handed them to the colonel with a triumphant—

"*Voilà, mon Colonel!*"

"Family matters," Withers protested faintly. "Sacred family matters. *Mon Colonel*, you can't read that. If you had a sweetheart—"

"I haven't," said the colonel. "Five days pack drill. I don't like to be reminded of my lost youth." He screwed his monocle into his eye and spelled out, " 'My dear Aunt Martha.' Oh, it's in English. Are you English?"

"Yes, *mon Colonel*, and what's more I'm proud—"

"Well, today, my man, you're a Legionnaire. Ten days pack drill instead of five for having forgotten that you are a Legionnaire. A funny people the English. Is your Aunt Martha your sweetheart?"

"She brought me up, *mon Colonel*."

"Made a rotten bad job of it. Now stand still. I have studied English. I shall not have to ask you to translate."

"You'll break a woman's heart if you read it!" Withers insisted. "It's not meant for other eyes than hers."

"Twelve days pack drill instead of ten. Government stationery was not designed for private correspondence. One more sound out of you—" the words came like bullets—"and you'll go to prison for twenty-eight days. You understand? Silence."

Withers stood mute. The cells at Hammadi were ten feet underground.

Before he reached the end of the first paragraph a frown appeared between the colonel's eyes; before he turned the first page he was livid with rage. By the time he reached the signature he was ready to froth at the mouth.

"This is terrible!" he exclaimed. "This is monstrous. You little jackal, I have caught you in the act—red handed. The pair of you!"

Until that moment Curialo had taken only a mild interest in the proceedings. He came back to earth with a jolt.

"Yes," snorted the colonel. "Both of you. Pigs! Gentlemen," he added, addressing his alarmed escort, "listen to this. I shall translate this man's atrocious English into French so that you may judge for yourselves. Here, remember, is a Legionnaire writing to a relative in a far country. He addresses her as his Aunt Martha. He begins with a preamble expressing the hope that she is in a state of health called a roseate condition. He himself, he says, is in very poor health. He is starving—a month has gone by since he has tasted meat. Exhausted though he is by privations, he has had to go into action nine times during the past four weeks. An inhuman colonel has caused the battalion to be butchered. Only twenty men of the original battalion survive! What hecatombs, messieurs! How appalling, is it not? But it is all here in black and white."

He shook the letter in Withers' face.

"Rascal! Good-for-nothing rascal! How dare you write such filthy lies?"

Before Withers could open his mouth the colonel shouted:

"Not a word! Don't pretend that I have distorted the things you have said. I shall translate literally:

> I can stand it no longer. Why should I fight the Frenchman's battles? I can not forget that I am a fragment off the ancient boulder (whatever that may mean). I must leave the Legion or else I shall make a noise like a frog.

"But let us proceed. He says he is determined to make a dash for liberty. His friend Curialo is with him. This Curialo, it appears, is an American from New York. He too loathes the Legion and the abominable brutalities of the sergeants. He is a rough diamond, this Curialo, and, blood being thicker than water, this evil pair of imbeciles intends to escape from our clutches at the first opportunity, whatever the cost may be."

"I'd like to point out—" began Curialo.

"Ten days pack drill," reported Colonel Meluche. "There follows a paragraph describing the author's longing to see again the dear visage of his aunt and to set tooth into one of her delectable steak-and-kidney pies. God willing, he will soon have the pleasure of going to church with her some Sunday morning. And now, gentlemen, we come to the main portion of this astounding document.

"You will be interested to learn that the oasis of Hammadi is lost in the midst of an ocean of burning sand. Aunt Martha can not imagine what it is like. It is not sand such as one finds on the Margate beach. There is more of it. It is hotter. In fact, it is a desert. Hammadi

stands in the heart of this arid wilderness —two hundred miles from anywhere."

A titter greeted this humorous remark. The captain smiled; the adjutant clapped one hand over his mouth; the orderly sergeant was convulsed with silent mirth. The colonel frowned. His underlings became grave and silent once again.

"It is no laughing matter," he declared. "This scoundrel now reaches the climax of his lucubration. He points out that he is without a penny to his name. So is Curialo. They are paupers. Without money they can not escape. They must have at least twenty-five pounds sterling to enable them to hire a trustworthy Arab who will guide them safely to the coast, where they intend to stow away on board a foreign ship. He has confidence in his aunt. He begs her to send him the money by return mail, otherwise he will certainly be dead. If she loves him she will not send a penny less and as soon as he reaches London he will work his fingers to the bone to repay the debt, plus six per cent. interest.

"And that, messieurs, is the gist of this lengthy, ill written, ill advised, utterly abominable letter. It concludes with kisses."

Carefully he folded the letter, ran his thumbnail along the creases and slid it into his breast pocket.

"So this is the private letter dealing with family matters," he commented, bending over and peering at Withers as though he were watching a worm on a pin. "It all depends, I suppose, upon one's point of view. In my opinion it is the most disgraceful thing I have ever read. You have slandered your chiefs, cast mud upon the flag you serve and promised to desert at the first opportunity. What, if anything, have you to say for yourself?"

Withers licked his dry lips. His manner became confidential and friendly.

"You mustn't take it that way, *mon Colonel*," he declared. "Maybe I did lay it on thick, but that doesn't mean I'm not satisfied. On the contrary! Only a few moments ago I was saying to Curialo, 'Curialo, I ask you, could one find a better commanding officer than ours anywhere in Africa?' and he said—"

"Liar!"

"What I said in that letter was meant only for my aunt. It's not what you might call official. No, sir. All I was after was a bit of money, a few francs to—er—celebrate Curialo's birthday."

"Rotten to the core," sneered the colonel. "No wonder your nation is called perfidious if it can breed such creatures. Money! For its sake he is willing to befoul everything he should hold sacred. It is foul! It is degrading. And what shall we say of this other ruffian who is willing to share in the spoils?"

"It's all news to me," Curialo asserted.

"Hypocrite!" Colonel Meluche was growing angrier and angrier. "Son of hypocrites. Dollar chasers. For gold you would sell honor, decency, self-respect. Pah! You are not fit to wear the uniform of the Legion!"

But he did not know what to do. No punishment is laid down in the *code militaire* for Legionnaires who merely express the intention of deserting. He could not even charge them with conduct prejudicial to good order and military discipline. He would have liked to have them court-martialed, but the case against them was too slim, and the advocate general might take exception to the way in which the evidence had been gathered.

Nevertheless something had to be done about it.

"Captain Chousson," he inquired of the orderly officer, "that culvert over the Argoub *oued* at Kilometer 5 hasn't been fixed yet, has it? No? Something ought to be done about it. Our guests will be leaving some time this afternoon. Send these two men out to repair it at once. I don't care how hot it is out there. It may sweat some of the vileness out of their bones. And they'll both do twelve days pack drill. That ought to be punishment enough. Orderly Sergeant, march them away!"

AN HOUR later they reached the culvert spanning the Argoub *oued*. It stood in the middle of a flat, shadowless plain covered with stones and clumps of bluish gray alfa grass. Southward the palm trees of the Hammadi oasis thrust ragged heads over the crest of a low ridge of sand. Northward, twenty miles away, a range of hills was warped askew by the heat haze. The rest was empty, sun baked desolation.

"Down tools," ordered the sergeant, "stand easy!"

He marched over to the culvert and inspected it with military thoroughness. Several blocks of stone had fallen out of the arch. The roadbed sagged ominously. It needed the attention of a corps of expert stone masons equipped for the job with cement, lime, props and the customary tools of their trade.

Curialo and Withers were armed only with one shovel, one pick, and a crowbar thrown in for good measure by the quartermaster-sergeant.

This lack of adequate equipment did not bother the sergeant. In the Foreign Legion he had been trained to rely on sweat and brawn instead of new fangled mechanical contrivances.

"It is quite simple," he declared. "An easy job. You'll build up a pillar beneath the right side of the arch to prop it up. The left side is still sound. Choose large blocks of stone and make it good and strong. Then you can shovel some dirt into the cracks in the roadbed. It'll hold until the rains anyway. Peel off your tunics and get to work. It's ten to two. I'll be back for you at five; if you loaf on the job you'll sleep in the cells."

He stood for some minutes on the top of the bank, watching them roll great boulders through the sand in the bottom of the *oued*. Sweat poured off their brown backs. Looking at them toil in that glaring white pit was enough to make him feel hot and limp.

"Put some life into it, *salopards!*" he called out. "Don't be afraid of dirtying your hands. Big stones, I said, not pebbles."

He laughed derisively as they strained and shoved, struggling for a foothold in the loose sand, where at every step they sank ankle deep.

"I wish you luck!" he jeered. "You want to desert, do you? Here's your chance. I'm not going to stay here and stew all afternoon. There's a bottle of white wine waiting for me at the mess. I'll call for you at five. If the job isn't finished—cells. *Salut!*"

His mind was untroubled as he hurried back toward Hammadi. He was morally certain he would find the prisoners at the Argoub culvert when he returned. They had no food, no water, no money. Zenaga, the nearest well, was thirty kilometers away. They did not have a water bottle between them. Before sundown, whether they worked or not, they would be gagging with thirst.

He swung down the road without once turning back—and as soon as he was safely out of sight, by mutual consent, the two troopers stopped work.

A long moment went by. Withers looked at Curialo—a look full of doubt, suspicion and anxiety.

"'Ot, ain't it?" he said for the sake of saying something. "Fair raising blisters on me shoulders, this sun is."

"You louse," said Curialo, twisting his mouth sidewise. "Blood's thicker than water, is it?"

He took a step in Withers' direction.

Withers backed away three steps.

"Don't do nothing you'll be sorry for later on," he admonished. "Don't you get nawsty, do you 'ear? Gor's truth, 'ow was I to know 'e'd pinch that there letter? Don't you come no nearer, yer big galoot, or mark my words I'll meet you more than 'alfway."

Curialo took a long step forward, whereupon Withers scrambled up the embankment and pounced upon the crowbar, lying on top of their tunics by the roadside.

"Nah, then," he announced defiantly. "Come on, if yer wants a row. Hi'm waiting. Me back's to the wall, as the saying is. The whole blooming world's

against me. Even you what ought to 'ave better sense."

Curialo's anger subsided. It was too blindingly hot to fight.

"It's O.K. by me, Bert," he chuckled. "No rough stuff. It's a tough break, that's all. Quit playing Horatio and be yourself."

"Who's 'Oratio?"

"You know—the guy on the bridge,

> "And up spake brave Horatio
> With a face as bold as brass . . .

"Something about fighting thirty thousand men. I forget. Take your big feet off my tunic. I want a cigaret."

Withers dropped the crowbar. They sat down on the culvert, their legs dangling in space, and shared the last battered cigaret Curialo fished out of his pocket.

"There's times," observed Withers, "times when, Gor'blimey, I'd like ter be out of this. Clean out of it. It's more than 'alf true what I said in that there letter. Think of being in London now. September, ain't it? Fog on the river, and wet streets—Lor' lumme! Think of walking into a pub and ordering a pint of beer! And talking your own lingo—and making a bit of money—and taking your girl to a show of a Saturday night! No more saluting—"

Curialo sat with his elbows on his knees, staring down at the shimmering sand.

"Yep," he agreed, "maybe. But give me New York. Hell! What's the use? It can't be done. Lil' old New York. I'd give ten bucks to be there now. Anywhere, uptown, downtown. Gosh, you could put me down in Brooklyn and I wouldn't have a kick coming. Damn you and your fool ideas!" He spat neatly between his swinging feet. "Twelve days extra drill. Bert, I've had a skinful of the Legion. I'm sick of forming fours. I'm sick of this damn sun eating into my skull. My brain's going soft."

"Same 'ere," approved Withers. "'Ow much service 'ave you got anyway?"

"Ten years and eight months. More than enough."

"I been in ten and six months come October. Wonder why I signed on again? Yer gets in a sort of rut, as the saying is." His mind hopped back to the stormy session with Colonel Meluche. "Perfidious, huh! Me, what's been wounded four times. Perfidious!"

"And I'm a dollar chaser. Yep, I've had more than enough, and there's no way out."

They grew gloomier and gloomier. Their faces grew longer and longer. The charred butt end of the cigaret hung limp in the corner of Curialo's mouth. He did not bother to relight it.

All at once Withers stirred and looked over his shoulder in the direction of Hammadi.

"'Ark!" he said sharply. "'Ear anything?"

The faint, far off throb of an engine beat against their ears. A pillar of dust, blotting out the green tree tops, was rolling swiftly toward them.

"Car coming," grunted Curialo.

"Them blokes what stayed with the colonel lawst night. Blooming tourists." His tone was charged with contempt. "Must be balmy to come cruising around out 'ere when they could be cool and comfortable at 'ome."

Deep in thought, Curialo watched the dust cloud hurry onward.

"Bert," he said, tapping Withers' shoulder, "the culvert ain't safe. That car's traveling fast. If it sticks to the middle of the road it's going to spill over. We got to flag those birds. They'll have to stop. Get me?"

The same idea was stirring at the back of Withers' mind.

"Can you 'andle a motor car?" he inquired. "Drive it, I mean?"

"Drive anything on four wheels. Used to drive a truck. Leave it to me."

THEY struggled into their tunics and ran down the road, waving their arms. The car, an open, custom built model with a long, tapering bonnet of glittering aluminum, slithered to a standstill.

Two gentlemen all dressed in white

occupied the front seat. They wore pipe clayed helmets adorned with brightly colored *puggarees*. On the running boards, within easy reach of the passengers' hands, a brace of rifles were fastened in metal clips.

Never before had Curialo or Withers seen such a luxurious, high class vehicle. It stank of money.

The travelers smiled brightly. They had been dined and wined by the officers of the Hammadi garrison and their hearts were full of gratitude, not only toward that one group of officers but toward the entire French colonial administration which had spared no pains to make their trip enjoyable.

They were no common or garden variety of tourist. Mr. Stanislas Swiecinscki, the driver, was part owner and star leader writer of Warsaw's leading morning paper. His companion was none other than the brilliant pen and ink artist, Mr. Ladslaw Razovich. They belonged to that privileged class which is *persona grata* with colonial ministers.

When they applied for permission to visit the wastelands of North Africa they had found their way magically smoothed for them. Politics may have had something to do with it. The long headed officials at the Quai d'Orsay may have looked upon the trip as good propaganda. Whatever the ulterior motives may have been, word had gone forth to every post along their carefully planned route to make their visit a pleasant and memorable one.

They had seen everything there was to be seen from Rabat to Beni-Abbes, from Sfax to Alger. Now they were headed northward, out of the desert. In two more days their automobile would be slung on board ship and the trip would be over.

They were delighted, whatever the pretext, to stop and talk to any stray soldiers they happened to meet. Soldiers were particular friends of theirs.

"Good day to you, my friends!" cried Mr. Swiecinski, a large, hearty man with a curly black beard. "What is it that we can do for you?"

The original intention of the so-called friends had been dastardly. They had meant to take possession of the car, pitch the rightful owners out and make a headlong dash for freedom. On second thought, however, Curialo decided against immediate violence.

"Go easy," he cautioned in a hoarse aside. "Mind them guns, Bert. We'll hop a ride."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Swiecinski. "English! I speak English alzo. You are British? No? American. Yes? That is so? Splendid! Magnificent. A strange country. A land of anachronisms. An American in a French uniform in the Sahara desert. The Western World united in its effort to modernize Islam. You see it so, Razovich? It is typical of the French genius. So supple and adaptable."

"The bridge is on the bum," explained Curialo. "Hug the left side or you'll ditch the bus."

"Thank you, my friend," beamed Mr. Swiecinski. "We were warned. But what efficiency! What thoroughness! This is a significant incident. Razovich, *mon cher*, you see what I mean; no detail, however small, is neglected. Here is a bridge, a ten-meter span, a bit of masonry lost in the heart of a desolate wilderness, but it is watched, guarded, repaired."

He talked so well, and he talked so much, and his accent was so strange that Curialo and Withers could only gape at him in wonderment.

"You," Mr. Swiecinski went on, indicating the troopers with an outflung hand, "you, my friends, have good cause to be proud of the uniform you wear. You epitomize an epoch, the bridge guard at—at what? Has the bridge a name?"

"Argoub," said Withers. "Kilometer 5. Could you—"

"Bridge guards at the Argoub *oued*. Yes, I see it. I grows on me. It is worth expanding into a whole chapter. Razovich, could you make a rapid sketch of the scene? No romance. Stark facts. Desert, a desolate ravine, emptiness. Two men in soiled working clothes."

Mr. Razovich was not quite as enthusiastic as his employer. He had been studying the troopers through his smoked glasses, and it seemed to him that there was something fishy about their behavior. What, he wondered, had the tall, gaunt ruffian meant when he told his companion to "mind them guns"? Why were they hanging about so close to the car?

"I can remember the details," he promised. "It's quite simple. I don't like to sketch in this light. It's bad for the eyes. We ought to be getting on, I think, if we intend to reach Kreider tonight."

"True," agreed Mr. Swiecinski. "We, my friends, thank you again. Thank you!"

"Hold on a minute," urged Curialo. "Going north, are you?"

"Alas, yes. We are leaving this wonderful land . . ."

"We're going north too. Our time's up. How about giving us a lift?"

"Why, we'll be delighted. How far are you going?"

"Oh, up the road a ways. You see, we're in charge of this section and there's another section we ought to look at today."

"Sort of road engineers, that's what we are," added Withers. "Lor'lumme, there's times when we're away for days on end as you might say. Miles, we travel. Why, only lawst week—"

"Do you always go about like this?" Mr. Razovich inquired acidly. "Without equipment? Nor even a tent? No water?"

"Our stuff's up the road," Curialo broke in before Withers had time to think of a suitable answer. "We've got quite a camp."

Mr. Razovich leaned over and whispered in his neighbor's ear. They conferred for several minutes in their mother tongue. Mr. Swiecinski's ardor was considerably dampened.

"Are you quite sure Colonel Meluche will not object?" he inquired, turning to Curialo. "Colonel Meluche is such a splendid man. I should not like to—er—interfere with his arrangements."

"Would he send us out here if he didn't trust us?" retorted Curialo.

"True," admitted Mr. Swiecinski. "Very well. Mount upon the running board. Let us hurry."

"And you are leaving your tools behind?" commented Mr. Razovich, peering through the black lenses of his glasses. "Do you not need your tools?"

"We'll pick 'em up on the way back," Curialo assured him. "Nobody's going to steal 'em."

The car rolled forward. It crept across the culvert without mishap—and it went on creeping. Mr. Swiecinski was loath to step on the gas. He averaged a bare twenty-five kilometers an hour. The miles slipped away one by one.

"You can go faster if you like," Withers volunteered as he clung to the framework with one hand on Mr. Razovich's rifle. "We'll 'old on orlright."

Mr. Swiecinski appeared to be more than ever dubious.

"Is it much farther?" he inquired.

"Far?" grinned Withers. "Gor'blimey, mister, just as far as you like. We ain't never going to stop."

The cat was out of the bag at last. Mr. Swiecinski applied the brakes with so much force that the car skidded sidewise in the feathery dust.

"I do not comprehend," he snapped. "Have we been tricked?"

"Take your hand off that rifle!" ordered Mr. Razovich, trying to push Withers off the running board. "I had my doubts from the very first. You are trying to desert."

"We are," agreed Curialo, "and if you're wise—"

"No!" cried Mr. Swiecinski. "I do not want to listen. Certainly not! After the way in which we have been treated. I will not hear of it. You must get down. Your officers are splendid gentlemen. I can not be a party to any such conduct. Get down."

A silent struggle was going on between Withers and Mr. Razovich for possession

of the rifle. The struggle became more violent and less silent as the seconds went by.

"Bandit!" stormed Mr. Razovich. "Foul pig of an Englishman. I command you to—"

Thereupon Withers, who was tired of being called foul and perfidious, slugged him on the point of the jaw. He went over sidewise, colliding heavily against Mr. Swiecinski. The latter made a wild sweep at Curialo, missed and fell forward on to a large, hairy fist which crashed against his right ear and draped him, dazed, over the steering wheel.

"Ho, yus!" exclaimed Withers, hauling his victim out of the car. "I'm a foul pig of an Englishman, I am. I'm a dirty foreigner. I been called names like that for the pawst ten years. Fair fed up on it, I am. That's why I'm deserting. I'm going 'ome too, same as you are. Ain't that a fact, matey?"

"I'll say!" agreed Curialo, who was thinking of something else. "Listen, Bert, what do we do with these coots? We can't tote 'em all over Africa with us."

"Put 'em in our uniforms and dump 'em down somewhere not too close to Hammadi. They likes the army and the officers, so they says. Orlright, let 'em 'ave a taste of it in a blockhouse cell. Gor'blimey, let 'em find out what it's like to epitomize a blooming epoch."

"Shameless rascal," sputtered Mr. Razovich.

"Strip!" ordered Curialo, a mean, hard look on his face. "No back chat. Right down to the skin."

"I refuse!" declared Mr. Razovich. "I will not submit to the indignity. Not one stitch—"

"Snap out of it," drawled Curialo, nursing the rifle in the crook of his arm. "If we leave you here you'll croak. It's twenty kilometers to Zenaga. You're soft. You couldn't make it. I'll give you one minute to make up your mind."

Half an hour later Curialo, all dressed in white, with a sun helmet crammed down over his eyes, slid the gears into first and stepped gently on the gas. Twelve cylinders purred smoothly beneath the aluminum hood.

"Baby doll!" he crooned, rubbing his shoulders against the burning hot leather. "She's a peach. Watch her, Bert. Bambino!"

The car leaped like a thing alive.

"Going 'ome!" chortled Withers. "Blimey! 'ome!"

Overcome by his emotions, he blew his nose in one of Mr. Razovich's handkerchiefs.

In the back seat, among the bags and the camp equipment, the rightful owners of the automobile lay side by side, securely bound and gagged.

Late that night, three hundred kilometers to the north, on the outskirts of a small village they were hoisted out and released.

"I won't damage the bus," promised Curialo. "She's a bird. You'll find her at Casablanca or Rabat. Make it Rabat. The governor-general is sure to want to see you and tell you how sorry he is."

"And when you writes your book," added Withers, "put in a chapter about military prisons. Tell 'em about the vermin and the moldy bread. And don't forget to give my compliments to Colonel Meluche. But I'll be 'ome by then, Gor'blimey! England. Going 'ome like a blooming toff. Gawd, talk about swank! Silk underwear! Some clawss, eh, what, matey?"

FORTY-EIGHT hours later the staff of the Grand Hotel Continental at Oran was thrown into a flutter of excitement by the unheralded arrival of two very distinguished guests.

The manager received them in person for they were too important to deal with such obscure persons as room clerks. He supervised the triumphant entry of their vast automobile into the hotel garage; he dirtied his hands helping to unload their mound of valises, kit bags and suitcases. He did not demean himself by asking his guests what kind of accommodation they

wanted; only the very best was good enough for them.

They were wafted into the one and only elevator in the hotel.

"Suite A" the manager told the red coated attendant. "The presidential suite."

The elevator creaked and shook its way upward. It stopped at the second floor. Valets and chambermaids lined the way. The manager walked ahead of the guests with his hands clasped across his stomach and his head tilted slightly on one side.

He flung open a door.

"Suite A," he announced, as though he were throwing open the gates of heaven. "If the messieurs will be so kind as to give themselves the trouble of entering—"

The messieurs entered. Thick carpets covered the floors. On the carpets were thrown even thicker rugs. The furnishings of the suite, which had once been occupied by a genuine president of the republic, were sumptuous. The drawing room was a symphony of red plush and gold. There were couches deep enough to accommodate a president and his entire cabinet.

"Gor'blimey!" exclaimed the so-called Mr. Razovich, stunned by his surroundings.

"Monsieur spoke?" inquired the manager.

"Let us now see the bedroom," said Mr. Swiecinski, treading heavily and deliberately on his companion's toes.

"The bedrooms," corrected the manager, rubbing his hands together with unctuous satisfaction.

There was an ivory room and a blue room, with vast double beds of mahogany and brass in the best Empire style. Gilt clocks stood on the mantlepieces; there were reading lamps by the beds, and pier glasses, and a *coiffeuse*, and heavy draperies, and Eighteenth Century prints on the walls.

Then there was a white tiled bathroom full of nickel plated pipes and glittering mirrors.

Even Mr. Swiecinski was impressed by the bathroom.

"Hot water?" he inquired.

The manager gave him a rather condescending look. He turned on a faucet. Out gushed a stream of boiling water.

"*Voilà!*" he announced. "Monsieur may bathe and repose himself from the fatigues of his long journey. One has read in the papers of the magnificent trip monsieur has accomplished. One comprehends that monsieur desires a bath. And now if I may be permitted to show monsieur one more thing I shall retire. Monsieur no doubts wishes to rest before he attends to his numerous engagements.

He led the way back to the drawing room and opened the French windows.

"The view," he explained, stepping out onto the balcony. "Incomparable, messieurs. Unique!"

He spoke proudly as though the view had been specially designed for the benefit of the guests occupying Suite A. It was very fine indeed. The hotel was situated on the brow of the cliff overhanging the old town and the harbor. From the balcony, as Mr. Razovich so tersely phrased it, one could almost spit down into the funnels of the steamers at dockside. The docks were not particularly romantic, but the sight of them was calculated to warm the heart of any right thinking imperialist. Wheat bags stood in stacks as high as houses; there were whole streets of wine casks waiting to be sent to France to be sold as vintage Burgundy; there were unnumerable barrels of olive oil which, after a brief sea voyage, would acquire new labels and a better social standing.

Farther on, near the mole, there were pyramids of Welsh steam coal and a squat tank with the word "*Mazout!*" painted on its flank in letters twenty-feet high.

Beyond the mole, as smooth and as hard as a sheet of blue steel, lay the Mediterranean. Out at sea a ship trailed a smudge of black smoke across the sky.

Mr. Swiecinski gripped the iron railing of the balcony with both hands—gripped it so tightly that his knuckles stood out

white against his sun blackened skin. He inhaled a great lungful of air.

"Ships!" he commented. "Dozens of 'em. It's a big port all right."

"Lor'lumme!" whispered Mr. Razovich, overcome by the same emotion.

The manager stared at them curiously. The view, of course, was all very well in its way, and he found their admiration very flattering, but he had expected them to be more blasé, more sophisticated.

"To the right," he explained, "you perceive the hill called Mourdjadjo. Midway up the slope stands the old Spanish fort built in 1732. The modern fort is lower down the slope behind those trees—"

His guests were not listening to a thing he said. They could not take their eyes off the shipping in the harbor. Their behavior puzzled him. A faint shadow of a doubt crept into his mind. He was used to sizing people up at a glance, and somehow these gentlemen did not fit in with any of his preconceived notions.

The big one, Mr. Swiecinski, certainly did not look like a great newspaper proprietor whose editorials were quoted by the entire European press. The short man, the round eyed, snub nosed creature had none of the earmarks a successful artist ought to have. They were very young to be so famous, and there was something very queer about their clothes. The sleeves of Mr. Swiecinski's coat were several inches too short. Across his shoulders the coat was so tight that it seemed about to burst apart.

Mr. Razovich, on the other hand, was so loosely clad that his garments threatened to fall off. At times his chin vanished completely inside a starched collar which was beginning to wilt. His necktie, a gaudy blue-and-crimson confection, bulged out of his vest and climbed up toward his right ear.

Of course they were foreigners—Poles—which might possibly account for their queerness, but their behavior was bizarre to say the least.

They spoke a strange brand of French—so strange that it gave the manager, who was very refined, cold shudders. Had he not been dealing with such distinguished men he would have said that they spoke the language of the gutters. And when they reverted to their native tongue he could not help noticing that it had unmistakable affinities with English.

He was full of doubts, but he did not for one moment allow himself to be anything but urbane and tactful. When he thought of the great car resting in the hotel garage he was ready to forgive everything—clothes, language and behavior.

"I trust the apartment will be to your liking," he purred, after having given his guests ample leisure to inspect the ships. "If so, messieurs, I shall leave you—"

Mr. Swiecinski came out of his trance.

"*Ca va*," he agreed. "It'll do. Say, what kind of boats are they down there?"

The manager shrugged his shoulders. He regretted his lack of knowledge, but his interest in shipping was restricted to the comings and goings of passenger carrying vessels. There were only freighters in port at the present moment.

"Yes, but what kind of freighters?" insisted Mr. Swiecinski. "Any foreigners among 'em?"

"At present, no. Most of our exports go to France. We—"

"Never mind statistics now. That boat out there—" he jerked his thumb in the direction of the smoke smudge—"is it coming or going?"

"It would seem to be approaching. Yes, it *is* approaching. Monsieur is interested in the movement of foreign ships?"

Mr. Swiecinski looked at him thoughtfully. There was a cold, hard glitter in his eyes.

"If anybody asks you," he retorted, "tell 'em you don't know. Of course I'm interested," he added scornfully. "You'd be interested too if you'd been away from the sea as long as I have."

"He's crazy about it," Mr. Razovich declared. "He's like a child when he gets near salt water."

IT OCCURRED to the manager that it was strange for a Pole from Warsaw to have such a passion for the ocean and for seven thousand ton tramp steamers, but he wisely refrained from any further comment.

He breathed a sigh of relief when he stepped off the balcony into the room. For some inexplicable reason he no longer felt safe in the company of his distinguished patrons. Gentlemen of their social standing had no right to have such work hardened hands, nor ought they to look so lean and determined. They made him feel like a lamb, a young and juicy lamb, frisking about with a pair of wolves. The balcony was much too high. He saw himself twirling through space and landing with a bone crushing thud on the glass veranda of the café. It was an absurd thought, but he could not drive it away.

He trotted across the room toward the door. With his hand on the doorknob he paused and made one final, deferential bow.

"If there is anything you need, gentlemen, the staff is at your disposal," he pointed out. "Laundry service, valeting, refreshments."

Mr. Razovich draped the loose folds of his coat across his chest after the fashion of a Roman senator wrapping himself in his toga.

"Send up a couple of quarts of champagne," he ordered with a flourish. "And some caviar."

"At this time of year caviar is not to be had. If I may make a suggestion—"

"Needless! There being no caviar let us have some nice ham sandwiches."

"And some cold chicken," supplemented Mr. Swiecinski, "and a box of cigars."

"The best in the house," urged Mr. Razovich. "I got a jaded palate, as the saying is."

The manager, more stunned than ever, let himself out of the room.

No sooner had the door closed behind him than the two distinguished guests tottered over to the couch and collapsed, their shoulders heaving.

"Gor'blimey!" sputtered Withers, when he recovered his breath. "'Ow about it, matey? Champagne and cold chicken. 'E was fair dazzled, 'e was. Couldn't believe 'is ears."

"Presidential suite," choked Curialo. "If they catch us, Bert, it's ten years in the cooler. We got about fifty francs left; that's all. I spent the rest on gas at Saida."

"And a clawssy trip it was orlright. Gendarmes saluting us and lending a 'elping 'and. I ain't worrying about nothing. There's the blooming 'arbor. It's full of ships. This time tomorrow night we'll be out at sea. We're going 'ome, matey. It'll be good to see a cloud again. Bracing, that's what it is, the weather in England."

"Not so fast," grunted Curialo. "Wait till we find a ship. No good trying to sneak on board a French boat. And we can't afford to hang around here for long. If they spot us the jig is up. I got my doubts about that slick guy. He was sort of suspicious toward the end."

"We look orlright, don't we?" protested Withers. "Why, we acted like a pair of toffs. Why should 'e be suspicious?"

"We didn't high hat him enough, I guess. Say, I'm wondering about that ship out there. Where's she at now?"

They went back to the balcony. The ship was nearing Oran. She was small and squat and black, but she was still too far out to sea for them to distinguish either her name or her flag.

When the waiter came in to set up the table for their light luncheon they were pawing through their bags. They were so busy that they hardly noticed his presence, and he was still in the room, uncorking the champagne, when Withers found what he was looking for—a pair of binoculars.

They rushed back to the window. For a moment they were silent; then Withers cried out:

"Gor'struth, she's English. *Star of Cardiff.* See 'er! Look, matey, look! She's flying the old red rag."

Tears dribbled down the sides of his nose.

Curialo snatched the binoculars away from him and cursed at the time he had to waste readjusting the sights.

"You're dead right," he exulted. "Bert, I hand it to you. This is the first time I ever got a kick out of seeing that flag. We'll let bygones be bygones. Shake!"

They shook hands; then, falling into each other's arms, they danced wildly about the room.

"The collation is served," the waiter observed, dodging out of their way. "Shall I pour the wine?"

"You're still here, are you?" exclaimed Curialo. "Sure, pour anything you like. Have one on us. *Allez*, beat it! Get out of here quick!"

The waiter fled.

They drew up, panting.

"Yer big blighter," cautioned Withers, "you'll give the whole show away. Act more 'igh toned. Who ever 'eard of offering a blooming waiter a glass of champagne?"

"We should worry!" gasped Curialo. "We're sitting pretty. That boat—what's her name? *Star of Cardiff*—she'll be alongside in an hour. We'll finish this hooch and beat it. You can talk turkey to the skipper. Limey to Limey. Lay it on thick, see?"

"Leave it to me," Withers assured him. "Gor'blimey, 'e'll be offering us 'is own blooming cabin before I'm through."

He pulled a bottle out of the cracked ice and poured champagne into the glasses. It frothed over on to the table cloth. He kept the bottle upended until the glasses were brimful and the table cloth sopping.

"Goodby to the Legion!" cried Curialo, holding up his glass. "Ten years of it. Here's looking at you, Bert. Drink her down!"

"And fill 'em up again!" chorused Withers, who was too excited to stand still. "'Ere's to good old London Town in a fog on a Saturday night. 'Ere's to the old tram cars and the Blue Boar by the East India docks! 'Ere's to 'ome, matey! We're going 'ome!"

BETWEEN drinks they went to the balcony and stared at the incoming freighter to make sure it was still afloat. It passed the lighthouse at the end of the mole. A whiff of white smoke eddied above its smokestack. Seconds later the shrill blast of its whistle reached their ears.

"She's in," said Curialo. "We'd better be moving."

"And didn't she come in pretty?" said Withers. "Neat, I calls it. It tykes a blooming Briton, it does, to 'andle a boat like that. A nytion of sailors, that's what we are. Britannia rules the waves, as they say. You never saw—"

"What the hell do you expect him to do—ram the mole or come in backward? I'll buy you a flag when we get to London. Never mind that now. Listen, Bert, ring that doggone bell. Order a bottle of hard stuff. Cognac. I need a last shot before we start out. My legs are all shot. It won't take ten minutes to reach the docks."

Withers rang the bell. A minute went by. Two minutes. He rang again. The *Star of Cardiff* had reversed its engines and was edging in alongside the coal wharf.

A knock came at the door of the apartment.

"Come in," they both shouted simultaneously.

The door opened.

"Bring me—" began Withers; then he stopped dead.

On the threshold, instead of a *valet de chambre* in a green baize apron, stood a smart young staff officer with a row of medals on his chest and a look of mild astonishment on his handome face.

Withers' lower jaw worked spasmodically, but no coherent sound came forth. All he could say was "Caw! Caw! Caw!" like a crow.

"What's wrong?" inquired Curialo, who was leaning out over the railing of the balcony. "You ain't being sick, are you?"

"Caw!" said Withers, pawing at his collar.

Curialo turned about. He too spied

the officer standing in the doorway. For one split second he was tempted to take a flying leap at the intruder's throat. Before he had time to act, however, the officer spoke:

"Pardon me," he said in a most amiable manner, "but have I the honor of addressing Messieurs Swiecinski and Razovich?"

"Exactly," agreed Curialo. "This is my friend and colleague, Mr. Razovich. I am Mr. Swiecinski. Won't you come in? Pray do come in. Allow me to close the door."

"Enchanted to make your acquaintance," the officer went on. "You will excuse the informality of my call, I am sure. You see, the management of the hotel reported your arrival to police headquarters only a few minutes ago."

"Oh, did he?" commented Curialo, his eyes narrowing down to thin slits. "Well, what of it?"

"Impudence, that's what I call it," snorted Withers, slowly recovering his wits. "Shameful interference with our rights!"

"Not at all," soothed the officer. "You do not follow me. It is quite regular. Police control, you know. The management is compelled to report its guests."

"The minute they arrive?" inquired Curialo. "I am astounded!"

The officer was as smooth and diplomatic as only young staff officers can be. Unperturbed by Curialo's outburst, he stood in the middle of the room peeling off his gloves.

Everything was so simple and straightforward, he assured them. All sorts of people came to Oran. Many of them were undesirables. The police had to be on the alert at all times.

"Never before have I been classed as an undesirable alien!" Withers broke in, thrusting his chin out over the rim of his collar. "Never!"

"Ah, but that is not the point." The officer smiled. "Not at all. The general much appreciates the thoughtfulness of the hotel management. He might not have had the pleasure of meeting you had it not been for this providential telephone call. He was planning to leave Oran tomorrow morning on a tour of inspection, but he cancelled the tour as soon as police headquarters got in touch with us."

"That's just too bad," sighed Curialo.

"He is very anxious to meet you," explained the officer. "Of course he realizes that after such a long trip you want a little privacy and rest. His invitation will reach you through other channels tomorrow morning."

What he did not say, however, was that his own hurried visit was due to the fact that the management had urged the police bureau to verify the identity of its guests without delay.

"The dear general!" cried Withers. "I'm looking forward to the pleasure of meeting him—tomorrow."

The officer cleared his throat. He too had the gravest doubts as to the identity of these extraordinary individuals. Why, for instance, were their heads close cropped? Why were their fingernails in such a shocking state? They were foreigners. At Hammadi, where they had last been entertained, there was a garrison of the Foreign Legion—

"There is just one small formality which, I am sure, you will not mind complying with," he said casually. "You know how hidebound officialdom can be. There's so much red tape. Would you mind showing me your passports, please, so that I may make a note of their numbers? It won't take two minutes."

For the space of a heart beat the two distinguished guests stood rooted to the ground. Withers turned a pasty gray. His arms hung limp at his sides. He gazed helplessly at Curialo—and he thought he saw Curialo's right eyelid flutter ever so slightly.

"*Eh bien!*" said the officer, and his tone was sharp. "I am waiting."

"A thousand pardons," drawled Curialo. "I am trying to remember where I put my passport. Razovich, dear friend, you are more orderly than I. Your pass-

port is in your pocket, is it not? Show it to the officer while I am hunting mine."

With trembling fingers Withers extricated the document from an inside pocket. He laid it on the table.

"Thank you," snapped the officer.

He opened the passport and skimmed rapidly through the pages until he found the photograph of the bearer.

"As I thought," he exclaimed. "This is not your passport. The game is up. You—"

His voice strangled in his throat.

Curialo, stepping in behind him, had thrown a handkerchief over his head, around his neck. At the same time Curialo drove one knee into the small of his victim's back.

"Snap out of it!" he whispered. "Quick, Bert. Go for his legs. Don't let him squirm. No noise."

A strangled cry burst from the officer's lips. Curialo twisted the handkerchief a little tighter. The cry died away.

In five minutes it was all over. Bound, gagged, a pillow case of genuine linen tied over his head, the officer rested as comfortably as possible on the bed in the ivory room.

"Lor'lumme!" commented Withers, wiping his hands on his trousers. "That was a near squeak orlright. 'Struth, I thought it was all over. Matey, you mark my words, we got to get out of 'ere, and the sooner the better, says I."

"You said a mouthful," grunted Curialo. "We're going. Wait, though. I got a hunch. Stand back behind the door." He took a small bronze statuette off the mantlepiece and shoved it into Withers' hand. "Grab hold of this. Now go on talking as though you were talking to that guy. Say something about how pleased you'll be to take tea with the general. Get me?"

"Ain't you smart!" applauded Withers, swinging the statuette at arm's length. "You got a 'ead on you and no mistyke." He broke into loud French, "*Ah, oui, Monsieur le Captaine.* But yes, we shall be charmed to meet the general. We have heard so much about him!"

CURIALO opened the door. In the corridor, leaning against the wall, stood a gendarme, his arms folded across his chest. He sprang to attention as soon as he heard the sound of voices.

Curialo beckoned to him.

"Your officer wishes to speak to you," he explained. "Step this way will you?"

"*Bien, monsieur,*" said the gendarme.

He hurried into the room.

"Colonel Meluche, at Hammadi, is a particular friend of ours," he heard Withers saying. Then the base of the bronze statuette struck the base of his skull and he heard no more.

Curialo caught him as he fell.

They laid him on the bed in the blue room. He was bleeding profusely, so, to avoid damaging the bedclothes, they put a bath mat beneath his head.

"'E ain't dead, that's one good thing," observed Withers. "Gawd knows, I let 'im 'ave it proper. But yer cawn't kill a gendarme that way. 'E come to just before I popped the pillow case over 'is 'ead. 'E gave me a dirty look orlright."

"Let me tell you something else," Curialo pointed out. "If we're caught now you'll wish you were dead. It's life for the pair of us. Maybe Guiana if the prosecutor has his way. I crave to set foot on the *Star of Cardiff*. All set, Bert? Let's go."

They caught up their sun helmets and tiptoed to the door of Suite A. The passage was deserted. Curialo locked the door and slipped the key in his pocket.

"The back way for us," he cautioned. "That louse of a manager'll be on the lookout in the lobby."

They went through a swing door marked "Service" and clattered down two flights of iron steps. Midway down the last flight they passed a chambermaid who gave a squeal of surprise as they rushed by. They came out into the kitchens. A white capped chef and several Arab assistants stared at them. A potbellied janitor barred their way.

"Guests should use the main entrance,"

he said severely. "I must ask you to go back—"

"Not these guests," retorted Curialo. "We're going out this way to avoid publicity, see?"

"My orders."

"If you don't get out of my way I'll flatten you out," rasped Curialo.

The porter stepped nimbly to one side.

They tumbled out into the street. High overheard they heard angry shouts. Looking up, they saw a man standing on the second floor balcony gesticulating frantically. A pillow case hung around his neck, and a towel fastened to one of his wrists flapped like a flag. People were stopping to stare up at him. A moment later he was joined by another man in a green baize apron. They both yelled in unison, but the noise of the heavy drays and the trolleys on the Boulevard Seguin smothered their voices.

Odd words drifted down:

"Stop! Assassins! Two—deserters—Stop!"

"It's 'im," muttered Withers. "It's that there orficer."

"Keep right on going," Curialo said between his teeth. "Don't look up. He's pointing our way. Step out, but don't run. Easy does it, Bert. Just stroll along."

They reached the corner. Glancing over their shoulders, they saw that the fat janitor had waddled out into the middle of the street. He too was yelling and waving his stumpy arms about.

Before any one thought of pursuing them they were safely around the corner, mingling with the slow moving throng which filled the sidewalk in front of the café of the hotel. The *aperitif* hour was in full swing. The little marble topped tables were packed and jammed. Musicians dressed in scarlet tunics sawed away at the *Cavalleria Rusticana*. Arab bootblacks ducked in and out of the crowd, banging their brushes on home made boxes.

Everybody seemed carefree and happy, for the sun had gone down behind the gaunt shoulder of the Mourdjadjo, and a cool breeze was driving the stagnant air out of the city streets.

With difficulty, at a snail's pace, Curialo and Withers elbowed their way past the café. They trod on people's feet. They were cursed venomously by music lovers who did not want to be disturbed. Some one called Withers a "dirty little imbecile." His sun helmet was knocked askew. He did not even bother to turn around.

They came at last to the broad Place d'Armes, flanked by the officers' club and the city hall and a bank. A wide avenue led downhill. They caught one glimpse of the sea, stained crimson by the setting sun. Down they went in long strides. The road was full of traffic; trolley cars and decrepit automobiles and donkeys staggering beneath the weight of great baskets, and drays drawn by half a dozen straining horses whose slipping hoofs struck sparks off the cobbles.

It seemed endless. It was endless. It took them at least fifteen minutes to reach the bottom of the hill and the narrow, crooked streets of the old town. They lost another quarter of an hour hunting for the coal wharf. When they asked their way people gave them intricate directions they could not follow.

They could not get away from the long, windowless wall of the customs warehouse. Twice they bumped into the same policeman close to the same gate.

"By heck!" said Curialo. "I'll ask him how to get to this damn coal wharf."

"Oh Lor'!" was all Withers could say. "Oh Lor'!"

The *sergent de ville* took pity upon the two foolish foreigners whom he mistook for shore going sailors. Their sun helmets amused him. They were crazy, of course, but then all foreigners were crazy. He was quite sure they were drunk.

"The coal wharf?" he repeated, speaking in a loud voice. "*Mais, mon Dieu*, it is not difficult to find. Straight ahead until you come to the wine docks, then left—but no, maybe you could not find it. I am going that way myself. I will put you on the right road; have no fear."

So, sweating with anxiety, they ambled along with the policeman for a mile or more. His pace was slow and deliberate. He talked endlessly about footling things —politics, reparations, the rate of exchange, intertional debts, the high cost of living. Every so often he stopped dead and held on to the lapel of Withers' coat while he drove home his arguments.

A dozen times they were on the point of braining him, but each time he walked on again just before their self-control gave way.

AT LAST over the top of a wall they caught sight of a mound of coal. They heard the rattle of winches and the imprecations of a foreman reviling an unseen labor gang. A gateway opened before them.

"You see," laughed the policeman. "It is not so hard to find."

Curialo slipped a two-franc piece into his hand.

"Adieu!" said the policeman. "A safe journey to you both!"

A dockguard stuck his head out of a window as they passed in at the gateway.

"What ship?"

"*Star of Cardiff*," stammered Withers.

The window banged shut.

Their knees were so weak that they had to walk arm in arm to keep from staggering.

Night was closing in. Overhead arc lamps crackled, shedding a blue-white light over the black sheds and the black roadway. The *Star of Cardiff* was unloading more coal. Cranes dropped huge bins into the bowels of the ship and hoisted them out shrouded in flying dust. The gnome-like figures of Arab laborers moved about in the twilight.

A flimsy gangplank lay between the wharf and the ship.

"We're there!" exulted Withers. "Gor'blimey, matey, we done it. Me 'eart's pounding fit to bust. Going 'ome! I can fair smell it orlready!"

"G'wan," said Curialo in a shaking voice. "Get up there and do your stuff."

The gangplank sagged beneath their weight.

"Hi, there!" a voice called out. "What do you want, monsour? 'Alt! Who're you after?"

The voice belonged to a stocky, thick set man in a sleeveless blue singlet, who was lounging against the railing near the top end of the gangplank. He had a bushy, iron gray mustache out of which stuck a short clay pipe. A disreputable cap was pushed onto the back of his head.

"What cheer, matey!" cried Withers. "'Ow's London Town these days? Can we come aboard. We'd like to 'ave a few words with the captain."

"Skipper's ashore," grunted the sailor. "You cawn't come aboard without a parss. Got a parss?"

"No, but—"

"Then you'll have to step down. Nobody's allowed aboard without a proper parss and that's all there is to it."

"It's urgent," insisted Curialo, shoving Withers up the gangplank. "If the skipper ain't on board how about the first mate?"

"Him?" The man took the pipe out of his mustache and spat down the side of the ship. "He's got his hands full keeping an eye on them wild banshees down in the hold. We don't allow nobody on board without a parss."

Withers edged up a step closer. His foot touched the iron plates of the *Star of Cardiff*.

"We got to come aboard," he pleaded. "It's a matter of life and death. The skipper, 'e'll understand when 'e sees us. I'm English, I am, and my mate 'ere 'e's from New York."

The watchman came and planted himself squarely in front of the gangplank. He slammed the crosspiece shut. In his right hand he held a length of lead piping.

He laughed a most unpleasant, derisive laugh.

"Think I'm balmy?" he demanded. "Think I'm going to let a pair of bleeding dockrats come aboard? I seen the likes

of you before. 'Op it! Get orff that there gangplank!"

"Gor'blimey! I'm trying to tell you—"

The watchman rattled the lead pipe on the handrail.

"'Op it!" he repeated. "I wasn't born yesterday. Dockrats! We had one come snooping around last trip at Brindisi, it was. To hear him talk you'd think he was a blooming angel. Yus, and he went ashore with the second mate's gold watch and two bottles of Scotch. Step back!"

"You got us wrong," Curialo put in. "Listen, brother, there's twenty years staring us in the face if we're caught."

"I thought as much as soon as I clapped eyes on you. I'm an 'ard working man, I am, and I don't want to truck with law breakers."

"You poor saphead, we ain't broke no laws. We're deserters. Get me? Deserters from the Foreign Legion."

"Legion of the damned," corroborated Withers. "Come a thousand miles, we 'ave, out of the blooming desert—and 'ere's a fellow countryman kicks me in the fyce, as you might say."

"That's a hot one," jeered the watchman. "Deserters! And from the Foreign Legion! Haw-haw! You can't pull my leg."

Withers stared wildly about. Night had closed in thick and dark. Overhead the long arms of the cranes swung forth and back like the fingers of some giant hand closing in upon him. There was a crash of coal spilling out of the bins, a rattle of shovels down in the hold. Steam hissed from the valve near the top of the funnel. The lighthouse at the far end of the mole swept the harbor with its dazzling glare, now white, now red. The whole world was black and evil and merciless.

"Gor'blimey!" wailed Withers. "You cawn't turn us down like this?"

"I'm telling you for the larst time," the watchman warned then. "Yer can't come aboard without a proper parss. I don't care what you are. Get orff the gangplank."

"We're going," agreed Curialo in desperation. "Tell me one thing. Where the hell is the captain at? When'll he be back? We got to get hold of him. Understand. *Got to!*"

The watchman relented a trifle as soon as he realized that they were not going to try to blarney their way on board.

"Skipper's been up to the consul's, most likely," he vouchsafed.

"Where's that at? Uptown?"

"Ask me another. I ain't never been ashore here, not beyond the pub just across the gates."

"When'll he be back?"

The watchman winked.

"Round about four in the morning, I should say. We're due to sail at five. He's a gay dog, he is."

"We can't wait that long. Every damn policeman in Oran will be looking for us before that time. They're looking for us right this minute."

"Desperate, ain't you. Well, I can't help that. I got orders same's everybody else. We don't want no trouble with the Frogs. They're bad enough as it is. Still, I don't like to see two blokes stranded in this blasted country, no matter what they done. Go find the Old Man and tell him your tale. It's ten to one he's at the Bar de Bristol. Bristol Bar that means in their lingo. You can't miss it. It's got pink curtains in the window."

"What's his name?"

"Brand. Charles Brand. You can't mistake him. He's got a red face and little blue eyes and he's middling fat. He'll be dressed in a blue suit with a couple of medals on his jacket. If I was you I'd go quick. There's a couple of police officers coming this way—"

THEY did not wait to find out what else he might have to say. One leap carried them off the gangplank into the black shadows thrown by the cranes. Crouching low, they watched the gendarmes march by.

"There's nothing else to be done," grunted Curialo. "We can't stay here. We'll have to find that skipper."

The coal yard seemed to be alive with shadowy figures. Whichever way they turned they stumbled upon Algerian laborers, or white foremen, or port officers. At every encounter their hearts stopped beating, but no one questioned them.

They found the Bristol Bar without difficulty. It was brightly lighted. The pink curtains were unmistakable. They pushed open the glass door and stumbled in. The place was crowded with ships' officers. The air was blue with smoke. It stank of whisky, cheap perfume and fried onions. Waitresses in short black frocks, their faces crusted with paint and powder, bantered playfully with their customers.

They found Captain Brand sitting on a bench against the wall at the back of the room. Four beer bottles were lined up in front of him on the table. Beside him sat a scrawny, olive skinned maiden with lustrous eyes and a slight mustache. She had one arm around the captain's neck. With the tip ends of her fingers she was tickling his ear. He appeared to find the sensation agreeable. There was a dreamy look on his brick red countenance.

The dreamy look disappeared, however, the moment Withers opened his mouth.

"Yes, that's me," he growled. "My name's Brand. What do you want?"

They stated their case bluntly, omitting nothing, making no attempt to add any fancy touches. The plain, bald facts sufficed.

Captain Brand's first reaction was unfavorable. The fact that they spoke his own language made no impression upon him. He had been at sea long enough to know that a sailor, though he may not have a girl in every port, is sure to meet at least one down-at-heel fellow countryman trying to bum a free ride or to cadge a few drinks.

"No," he said, shaking his head from side to side. "No, no, no, no. I can't do anything for you."

But they went on talking and by degrees he was impressed by their evident sincerity. They did not beg or whine. They did not ask for money. They were willing to work at any job which would land them somewhere outside of French territory. Nor did they look like drink sodden wharf rats. They were as lean and hard as nails.

Brand reached a decision two seconds after they had spoken their last word.

"That settles it," he declared. "Twenty years is a long time to spend in prison. Too long for young fellows like you. In your boots I'd have done the same thing, and I'm a sober, God fearing man. I'll take you with me."

"You mean it, sir?" breathed Withers, steadying himself against the edge of the table. "You'll take us along—back to England? 'Ome?"

Brand nodded.

"Sit down," he ordered. "You look green, the pair of you. A drink will do you good. Certainly I mean it. You're coming with me."

They sat down heavily. Words failed them. The best they could do was to grin foolishly at the old captain. He ordered four more beers. Their teeth rattled against the glasses as they drank.

"Now then," he said abruptly, "we've got to do things properly. I don't want trouble with the port authorities, or the consul or my owners. I'm going back ahead of you and I'll tell the watchman to let you through. Give me a five minutes' start. I don't want to know you're on board my ship until she's at sea. We'll just have one more beer and I'll leave you. Hey, girlie—" he clapped his hands to summon the waitress—"three more of the same."

"And me?" interposed the dark eyed siren sitting beside him. "You leave me so soon? You do not offair me anozer drink? You go away?"

"I am going away," the captain said gruffly. "Take your arm from around my neck, hussy. I'm a sober, God fearing man sore beset by temptation. *Allez!* Begone!"

She gave Curialo and Withers a dark and scornful look.

"You leaf me for zose men," she sneered. "Desairtairs!"

"I'm leaving you," he told her, "because I'm a married man with three children. Don't tempt me further. I'll buy you no more drinks."

"You no come back? I wait for you, *mon gros?*"

"You'll be wasting your time. Trot along. I want to talk to these friends of mine."

She flounced away from the table, holding her chin high in the air.

Left alone, the three men finished their drinks. The captain paid the bill and buttoned up his double breasted jacket.

"Y'understand," he summed up, "in five minutes. You won't be stopped this time, and once you're on board the whole French army can't drag you off."

He swung out of the café without looking back.

"Ever been to England?" inquired Withers, digging Curialo in the ribs. "You wait! Even the rain is sort of friendly in England. And the mornings at this time of year are a bit nippy. Makes you feel alive, the cold does."

"Four more minutes to go," grumbled Curialo, staring up at the clock. "I wonder can I get a passport for New York in England? Say, prohibition must be something fierce, but I don't care. Bert, I don't care if I never have another drink as long as I live. You're dead right, we're going home. And once I get there—"

"*Ces deux là!*" cried a shrill voice close behind them. "There they are the pair of them. Deserters from the Foreign Legion!"

They jumped to their feet and spun around. The dark eyed siren, her fists on her hips, laughed in their faces. Beside her stood two policemen with revolvers in their hands. Chairs scraped on the sanded floor. Fifty pairs of eyes were turned upon the culprits. A dead silence settled over the café.

"Perceive the dirty English," laughed the girl. "Yes, pigs of English, pigs of Yankees. I listen to their talk. They would have escaped. Brigands! They stole an automobile. They tried to murder a French officer. Swine! But I shall get the reward. I shall receive five hundred francs instead of the drink that fat hog did not buy."

One of the policeman crammed his gun against Curialo's ribs.

"Not a move!" he ordered. "I'll drop you if you bat an eyelash. You won't escape this time, *salopard!* Put your hands up—high!"

So THERE was nothing else to be done. They raised their hands shoulder high. The second policeman brought out a pair of handcuffs linked together by a thin steel chain. He snapped one of the bracelets on Curialo's left wrist and fastened the other one on Withers' right wrist.

The girl, no doubt, to show her patriotism, smacked Curialo's face.

"Remember me when you're breaking stones at the *bagne*," she jeered. "I hope you rot when you get there."

"Thank you," he drawled. "You are a perfect lady."

Whereupon the policeman clouted him over the back of the head with the barrel of his revolver.

"Shut your mouth, *salopard*. You've done all the talking you'll do for some time to come. We've got orders to shoot if you so much as raise a finger. Get on, the pair of you. Out you go!"

The café was no longer silent. Indignant Frenchmen booed and whistled. One gallant gentleman carried away by his emotions struck Withers across the mouth. Some one else kicked Curialo's shins.

They stumbled out of the café beneath a barrage of curses, squirting siphons and the dregs of wine glasses.

"Look there, Bert," said Curialo. "I ain't going back. I'm through."

Withers, whose mouth was bleeding, gave him one long look. He squared his shoulders.

"Orlright, matey," he agreed. "Say when."

As soon as they reached the pavement one policeman came up and caught hold of Curialo's arm.

"This way," he barked. "Turn left."

Curialo lurched awkwardly against him.

"*Alors quoi!*" he demanded angrily. "Drunk, are you? Stand up, I tell you. You aren't hurt. Wait until the prison guards have had a crack at your thick skull, you'll find out—"

Curialo's fist crashed against his face. He went down heels over head. Simultaneously Withers swayed forward and landed a savage kick in the pit of the other policeman's stomach.

Then they were off, tearing down the dark roadway, over the cobbles and the railroad tracks toward the gates of the coal wharf.

A great bellowing arose. The customers of the Bar de Bristol, who had assembled on the threshold to speed the foul deserters on their way, spilled out into the street.

Smack! A bullet whisked past Curialo's ear. He dodged sidewise, dragging Withers after him at the end of the chain.

A dozen shots rang out. Withers let out a yelp.

"Gor'blimey, I been 'it!"

Blood ran down the back of his neck from a graze above his right ear.

"Never mind that now," panted Curialo. "Keep moving."

Deer could have moved no faster, but the mob at their heels was traveling like the wind. A bare ten yards separated pursued and pursuers as they fled through the gateway on to the wharf. A guard hurried out of the darkness. He never knew what hit him. He was down and trampled underfoot before he could open his mouth.

The ten yards narrowed down to eight.

Ahead the *Star of Cardiff* loomed up, towering high above the dock. In the bows a score of men were gathered. As one man they opened their mouths and yelled:

"Run! You'll make it!"

The leading gendarme fired again. He missed, and at the same moment a hunk of coal caught him in the chest. He sprawled full length on the ground.

Withers and Curialo reached the gangplank with two yards to spare. They bounded up it and rolled over onto the deck. The crosspiece slammed shut.

Captain Brand, very much the sea dog, with his hands in the pockets of his jacket and his cap cocked over one eye, confronted the infuriated mob.

A policeman tried to duck beneath the handrail. He was pushed back firmly and none too gently.

"Those men—they are my prisoners!" he shouted. "They are criminals, bandits of the most dangerous!"

"I don't know what you are saying," Brand told him, "and what's more I don't care. I'm master of this ship, and I'm under British jurisdiction on these decks. I'm not going to allow you or anybody else to turn my ship into a monkey house."

The policeman spoke no English.

"Do you refuse to surrender the prisoners?" he demanded.

"I don't know what you're saying. No *parlez français*. Prisoners? What prisoners? You're making a mistake." He pointed down at the gangplank. "It's beginning to crack. *Compris?* Crack. Too many people on it."

The gendarme and his self-appointed posse backed away.

"You are interfering with the proper course of justice," he shouted from the dock.

Captain Brand leaned nonchalantly against the railing.

"All right, Mr. Turner," he sang out. "Carry on."

The rattle of the winches drowned out the gendarme's voice.

"Gor'blimey!" croaked Withers. "Hit's all over. We're 'eaded for 'ome this time. I'm bleeding like a stuck pig and, Lor'lumme, I don't care!"

And there the matter ended.

The French, who knew from past experience that they could not hope to lay hands on deserters once the latter reached foreign territory, waited until the follow-

ing day before they lodged a protest with the consular authorities. The consul expressed the right amount of regret and pigeonholed the protest. Nothing could be done, for the *Star of Cardiff* had sailed unhindered punctually at five o'clock that morning.

Three weeks later she ran into fog off the Goodwins.

Shivering with cold, Withers and Curialo sat outside the galley peeling potatoes. Their teeth chattered and their fingers were purple.

"Gor'struth," said Withers after the first shattering roar of the foghorn died away. "'Ere she is—the blooming fog. Cold! Cripes, it fair eats into the marrer of yer bones, don't it? And to think that at Hammadi, right this very minute, the sun is shining bright. It's a crime, that's what it is, this 'ere climate."

Curialo turned up the collar of his coat. He stamped his feet on the glistening deck.

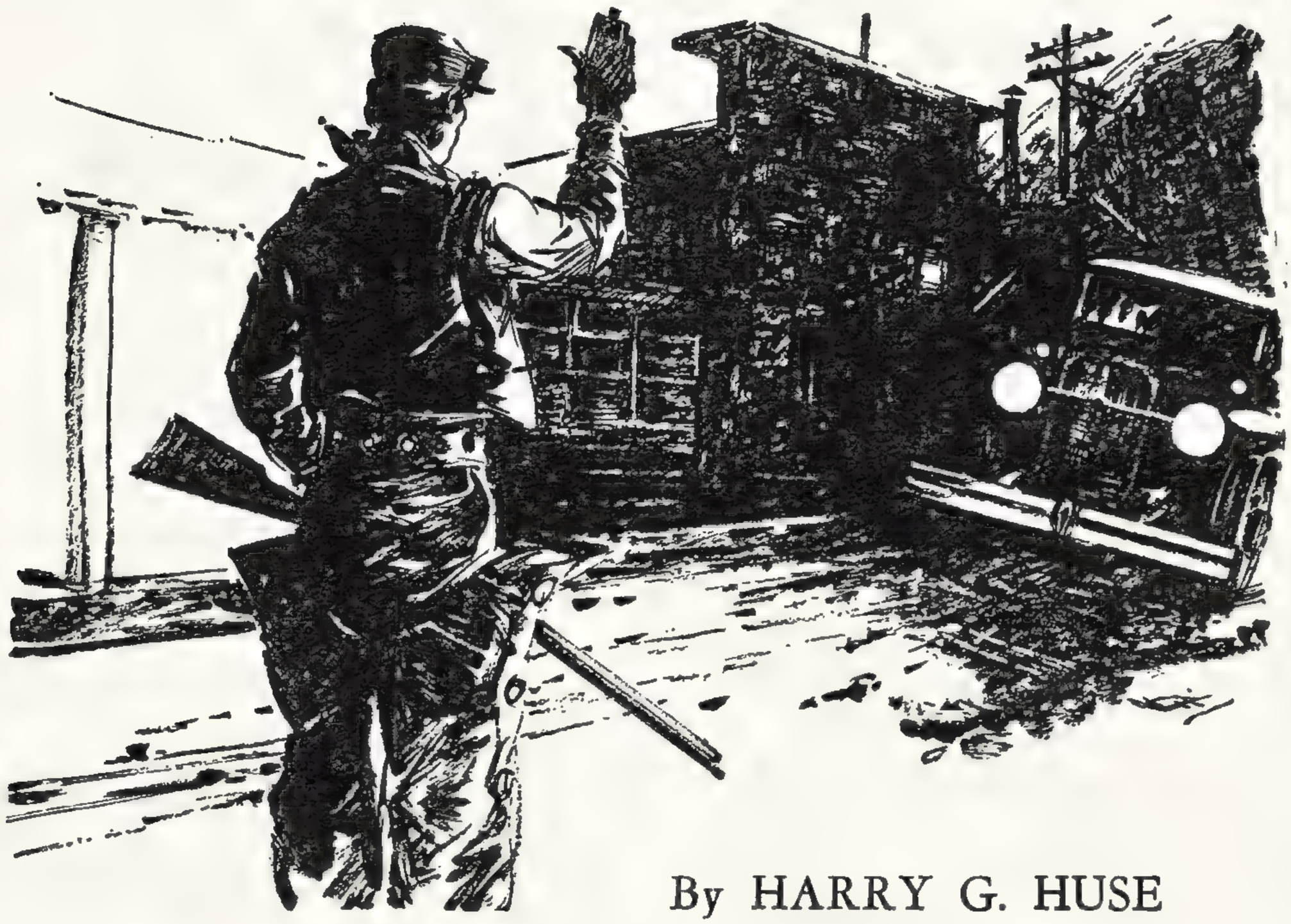
"Yes," he grunted. "It's a hell of a note. We didn't have such a bad time at Hammadi, all things considered."

"Lor'!" exclaimed Withers, giving him a startled look. "You don't think we made a mistyke, do you?"

The blast of the foghorn covered Curialo's unprintable answer.

An ironic tale of a

Montana Main Street



By HARRY G. HUSE

The JOKE

YES, SIR. Like I been telling you we just done it as a joke. That is, Hooch there, he done it. I got to give the poor feller the credick. It was him thought it up and started it, like he done everything else that kept things from being too dead-like up here to Elbow Butte. The rest of us, we just kind of helped keep it going.

Hooch Hyams, yes, sir.

Yes, sir, the said Elmer E. Hyams.

Yes, sir, the deceased.

No, sir. We hadn't no mind any harm would come of it.

I don't see how we could expect no harm would come of it more'n it'd just give all the boys a big haw-haw. Hooch started it just for fun, like I been telling you, one day when the fellers was hanging around the pool hall. He just thought it up and started it. There wasn't no more mind give it than any other kind of good natured fun a bunch of fellers'll think up. No, sir, no more mind than touching up a sheep herder's dog with high life, or pouring water in a tourist's gasoline tank.

Yes, sir. That's the way it started, just in fun. I guess you fellers—you gentle-

men—down there to the county seat don't realize how kind of dead it gits up here to Elbow Butte. You got a nice, up to date town down there on the river, and a park and tourist camp and cottonwood trees and grass and all, and a movie pitcher theayter. We ain't got nothing up here on the bench, as you can see for yourself, only them old tumbling down 'dobe buildings and two stores and a caffy and dance hall and this here place of mine—Eddie's Pastime Parlors.

It gits pretty dead up here all right. It ain't so bad for the dry landers and hired hands that are working out on the wheat ranches and just come in here Saturdays to trade. They'll git hold of some moon and play some pool or maybe a little blackjack, or go to the dance if there is one, and think they're having a hell of a time. But you take the fellers that are loafing round here steady with nothing much to do and I tell you it gits pretty dead.

That's the way it was the day Hooch thought up the joke on Willie Millen. Awful dead.

It was on a Wednesday-like, I 'member, and the fellers was all loafing in here. They wasn't doing nothing. Just slouched down in them chairs along the wall. Hooch Hyams, he was practising some trick shots there at the front table.

It was one of them hot days that takes the sap right out'n you. Everybody was feeling so dead they didn't nobody say nothing when Willie Millen come clomping in in them old run-over cowboy boots of his.

Generally when old Willie comes in that way, looking like somebody out of one of these here Charley Russell pitchers, why somebody'll say something and it'll git a laugh. Hooch Hyams 'specially, he'd almost always say something. Something like "Hey, Willie! Where's your horse?" or "Willie, they tell me your grandpaw was Big Chief Buffalo Chips hisself!" Willie won't hardly understand what he's saying, but'll just smile pleasant at being noticed and spoke to. Everybody else'll git a big laugh.

This time, like I say, didn't nobody say nothing. Hooch he didn't even look up. He's just got back from the Falls where he'd gone to deliver some stuff and's been on a bender for three, four days. I guess he's got a hangover and ain't feeling any too sociable or good natured. Willie just set down quiet in one of the front chairs, and took off that big old wreck of a Stetson of his, and wiped his forehead with the bandanner he's got round his neck. Hooch went on practising his trick shots.

Willie opens up a cigar box he's carrying with him and takes out a half finished horsehair hatband. He's real handy, Willie is, making fancy things like that with his hands. Maybe that's the half Injun in him. Or maybe, like I hear a feller claim, his not being bright in the head makes him cunninger with his fingers.

IT'S AWFUL dead. Nobody in town and nobody on the streets. Hooch quits practising after while and puts up his cue and buys a fresh deck of cigarets. He goes and sets down with the other fellers. He starts telling them 'bout the waitress up to the Falls that he's had on the bender with him. She's a dry lander's girl from somewheres down around Sandy that got into trouble and's been living quiet up to the Falls, working and taking care of the kid where don't nobody know her. You take one like that, Hooch claims, that's been good for a long time, and you git her to cut loose and you got something.

Hooch is still telling how this girl turned things loose after he got a few drinks in her when Ed Fensler comes rattling down Main Street from his place out on the east bench. Just as he gits to the corner out there a Hunyak dry lander drives in from the north, and danged if the both of their Fords don't come within a hair of smashing plumb into each other.

We all got up and run to the window when we hear their brakes chattering. Willie, he put down his braiding and rushed clean out on the sidewalk, all excited like a kid. He's past fifty, Willie is,

but that's the way he is 'bout any little happening like that. All interested and excited and kind of hopping up and down.

Ed and the Hunyak are laughing 'bout how near they come to having a colleesion. They park their cars and come in here to git a drink—a drink of near beer, that is; I guess you gentlemen know I don't sell nothing but near beer—and they're still joking each other.

Ed says if they'd hit square they could of give up wheat ranching and opened up a first class tin shop with the remains. The Hunyak says it looks like this here Montana she's gitting too crowded for safe driving. That's where Hooch got his idea. Willie'd come back inside when the others come in. He ain't took up his work but has stood listening to the joking. He looks real comical, standing there in that old cowboy git up of his, all serious and interested. Hooch sees him and gives the fellers a big wink. The Hunyak's right, he says, about this country being too crowded. It's got to where we need a traffic cop for Elbow Butte.

That gits a big laugh. Hooch gives the fellers another wink and says what say we call a meeting right now to vote on it. If the others are willing he moves we appoint a traffic cop and he here and now nominates Willie Millen. All in favor, he says, giving us another wink, say aye. We all say aye and Hooch he turns to Willie and tells him from now on he's traffic cop.

Willie's so tickled he just stands there with his mouth open. Like I been telling you he ain't quite right in his head. But there ain't nothing violent about him like I guess you gentlemen first thought. No, sir, there ain't nothing violent at all about Willie. He just ain't bright.

He's half Injun all right. But he come of good stock on his father's side; the best they claim, there was in this country. He'd of been somebody all right if he hadn't got throwed off a horse as a youngun and kicked in the head.

He's been round here, Willie has, ever since anybody here can remember. Him and them old 'dobe buildings where he lives. The other old-timers, the real old cattle ranchers, and them that's still alive, they're all gone out of the country. The ones that calls theirselves old-timers now, they're just the first dry landers that come in and homesteaded and started raising wheat. Things have changed here a lot in the last twenty years.

There ain't nobody left here that personally knowed Willie's paw, Old Alex Millen. But you'll still hear stories 'bout him and how he come into this country as a hide hunter, and married a Injun woman, and got hisself a few cows, and pioneered in the cattle business when there was still buffalo running wild on the range.

The way they tell it Old Alex'd come from a fine family back East. He aimed to make something out of Willie even if he was half Injun, him and his sister that'd been sent off to Mission School when she was just a kid.

After Willie got hurt the old man spent a lot of money trying to git him fixed up. But the doctors couldn't do nothing for him. He was just dull and couldn't do nothing 'thout being told. Alex couldn't even make a decent cowhand out'n him. Willie could ride and rope if somebody'd follow him around and boss him. But he wouldn't never think of nothing to do by hisself. He wouldn't even git on a horse unless somebody told him. Then he'd git on the worst one alive and stay on, too. He never got throwed ag'in after that first time. But somebody'd always have to tell him to git on.

WHILE old Alex was living there wasn't nothing too good for Willie. He got him a silver mounted saddle and chaps with silver doodads and paid a hundred dollars apiece to have his Stetsons made to order. Then Old Alex got ruined that hard winter you hear the old-timers tell about, the year it started snowing in October and kept at it till spring. He lost better'n ten thousand head. Cattle laying all over the bench when the snow melted, stinking something turrible. It put Old Alex right back where he started.

Before he could git going ag'in a bull caught him afoot in the corral one day and knocked him down and tromped hell out'n him. When they got him buried and things settled up there wasn't nothing left but them old 'dobe buildings at the edge of town that's once been a hay camp, and thirty, forty dollars coming in for Willie every month from some sort of insurance that couldn't be touched.

The girl come home from school and the missus, who was gitting pretty old and fat, come into town here and the two of them opened up a caffy in them old buildings. Willie went to work for some old friends of his father's that was willing to put up with him account of having knowed his old man.

The girl run off after while with the first feller that asked her, being pretty and brought up innocent at the Mission School. He was some kind of gambler. I hear she ended up in a place across the railroad tracks down to Billings. The old lady took a hard cold and died, and that left Willie. He stayed round first one ranch then another until the dry landers come in and the range commenced to git broke up. The old-timers sold out then and left the country.

Old Milo Harmsworth that Willie was living with was the last one to quit. He hung on until he was losing money hand over fist. I hear he offered to take Willie with him to California and kind of look after him. But Willie he wanted to stay here. He come into town and squatted down in that old building where his maw, she'd had her caffy.

That's where he's been ever since, living there by hisself at the end of Main Street there, and just pottering round town. He's always had a big liking for the cowboy clothes that he's always wore back in the old days, and he's hung on to them still. He's still got that pair of angora chaps with the silver doodads that his old man bought him, with the fur all wore off in patches, and old boots with high, run over heels, and that vest made out'n a spotted cowhide, and that old Stetson hat. He's the only thing left round here that'd tell you this was once a big cattle country, him and them tumbledown corrals down by the elevator.

Well, like I tell you, Willie's plumb tickled when Hooch he appoints him traffic cop. Seems like Willie's been up to the Falls once two, three years ago when Old Milo Harmsworth come back on a visit and found him still pottering round in that old cowpuncher outfit of his, and took him in to the city and bought him a whole new outfit of clothes. Willie ain't wore the clothes only when he was with Old Milo. He's took them off soon's he got home and went back to the old ones. But he's had a big time up there seeing the city and the street cars and police and fire department. He's been 'specially took with the traffic cops standing out in the street amongst all the automobiles telling people which way to go. Now that he's to be one his own self he just stands there with his mouth open wide and his eyes shining.

Hooch says take a look everybody at our new traffic cop, and it's all we can do to keep from laughing. Right now, says Hooch, is the time for our new officer to git started. He ought to be right out in the street now, learning his new job.

Willie puts away his horse hair and hatband, gives the cigar box to me to keep for him and says he's ready. Hooch, he takes Willie out in the middle of the street where the sun's shining down like it would try the lard right off your bones, and shows him where to stand, and how to face one way and spread out his arms to stop anybody that's coming from that direction, and then how to face a quarter of the way round and stop folks coming from the other.

Willie, he catches on real quick for him. He asks for a whistle 'cause he's heard 'em using them up to the Falls, and Hooch goes over to the store and gits him the only thing he can find, which is one of these toy horns with tassels on it like you'll give younguns for Christmas. He tells Willie it's really better'n a whistle and is the kind the real big traffic cops use back in Chicago and New York.

All this time there ain't been a wheel moving anywhere in town. That's what makes it so funny. That and Willie taking it so serious. Hooch, he tells Willie that now while the traffic ain't heavy is the time for him to practise so's he'll be good on the job when Saturday comes and there's lots of cars in the streets. He tells Willie if he was him he'd make believe autos was coming along from both directions and go through his motions just the same as if they was. So he leaves Willie there and comes back inside with the rest of the boys, and we all stand there in the window and have a big laugh.

It's better'n a show to watch Willie operate. He's standing out there in the middle of the empty street in them old moth eaten chaps and that spotted vest and them side hill boots and that big ruined old hat, just busier than a cranberry merchant and sweating like a Turk. He'll blow a big toot on that Santa Claus horn, and then he'll face down the street and hold out his arms stiff like a stachoo. Then he'll turn his head and look down the cross street to be certain there ain't no traffic coming from that direction, and lower his arms and motion some make-believe car to come on while he faces around and holds out his arms in the other direction.

I tell you it was a funny thing to watch. Couldn't nobody but Hooch of thought it up. We just stood inside there laughing until we was weak, watching old Willie a-working and a-tooting and a-sweating.

'LONG about mid-afternoon Art Sodders come into town in his Buick to git some repairs for his combine. We seen him when he was still way down the street, and we all got up to the window to watch the fun. Art come rolling down the street at a good, lively clip. I guess he seen Willie there when he was still two, three blocks off, but he didn't pay no 'tention to him. Willie let him git about ten rods away. Then he tooted his toy horn and put out his arms to stop him. Art slowed down some and kind of dodged off to one side so's he wouldn't hit him. But Willie jumped right in front of him, and before Art throwed on his brakes and come to a stop he dang near run Willie down.

We hear Art yell at Willie what the hell is it all about. We 'most die laughing there inside the pool hall. Willie don't say nothing. He just stands there, dignified and important looking, holding out his arms while he looks both ways down the cross street real slow and careful. Then he lowers his arms and motions Art to come on.

Art, he's got to laughing hisself by this time, the way Willie looks and all. He parks his car and comes in here for a drink. The fellers tell him the joke and he laughs like hell. He buys a drink for everybody—a drink of near beer, that is; I don't sell nothing stronger at this place—and Hooch, he feels so proud about having thought up such a good one, he loosens up and buys a drink too. After while when the sun gits lower and there's some shade out in front the fellers all go out on the sidewalk and have some more fun yelling and hollering at Willie.

Willie don't pay no 'tention to them, just goes on practising, and when Ed and Mike finally git their cars and pull out of town for home he directs them slow and careful past the corner. He's still standing there at seven o'clock in the evening 'cause nobody ain't told him when to go off duty. Hooch, he's gone off on some business of his own 'thout thinking about it I guess. Anyway if I hadn't gone out and told Willie this was the regular time when traffic cops quit he might of been standing there all night.

Well, sir, Willie's back on the job bright and early the next morning. He's brought hisself a lunch so's he can eat it at noon in my place and be able to keep his eye on his corner. Seems like it's funnier'n ever watching him there that second day. Hooch's borrered a pair of tin snips off the storekeeper, and him and another feller have cut out a big shiny star for Willie out'n the bottom of a milk pan. They got it fastened on Willie's chest, and it 'most covers the whole

front of that old spotted cowhide vest.

Hooch's got him to leave off that Stetson hat of his, and has fixed him up with one of these here black cotton caps with a shiny bill like a feller'll wear when he's working round a tractor. They got another smaller star fastened on the front of the cap. Willie's taking it all so serious and proud-like, I tell you he's sure a funny looking sight.

'Most everybody that comes in town and runs into him there on the corner for the first time gits a big laugh out'n it, all 'cept some of the women that say they don't think it's right to be making a fool of Willie that way. But you know how some women are about seeing a joke. Willie, he does git purty hot out there in the sun, 'specially 'thout his big hat on. I guess it's kind of hard on his feet, too, standing there all day in them old boots that was only made for riding and are worse'n ever now that the heels are all turned under. I notice he's limping some when he comes off duty that night at sundown. But he seems to be crazy 'bout his new job. It's a big thrill for him being so important.

Friday, I 'member, it rained. Willie don't hardly know whether he's to work when it rains or not. But nobody ain't told him not to so he's out there on the corner standing in the wet first thing in the morning. He's got a old yeller pommel slicker but it's been kicking round so long all the oil is cracked off. It's one of them cold Montana drizzles, and come noon he's soaked through and purty cold. The filling's all washed out of that cap of his and the visor has partly melted.

I guess he's hoping Hooch'll tell him there ain't no need standing out there the rest of the day when Hooch comes down to the pool hall 'bout noon. There ain't been a car in town all morning. But Hooch, he says a traffic cop has to git used to all kinds of weather and is really more needed on rainy days when the streets git slippery and folks are apt to skid than any other time. He says Willie's got the constitution of a ox and standing out there like that won't hurt him.

We're gitting kind of used to Willie standing out there by Friday evening. The fellers ain't gitting as big a laugh out'n it as at first. But come Saturday the town's full of dry landers come in to trade and a tourist or two to see the Butte and it turns out to be just a big riot all day.

Willie's there on his corner all morning stopping folks as they come down the street. A lot of them that hadn't been in town before and didn't know what was up couldn't understand it at first. There'd be a lot of arguing and jawing when Willie stopped them. But he just stood his ground and was firm and dignified and got in front of them when they made to go on anyway, and he forced them to do as he said. After while they mostly all see the joke and git to laughing with us too.

LATE in the afternoon was when the most fun was. The place here was full of fellers and some of them was purty well lit up on moon—they brung it with them or got it off somebody else; I don't sell nothing here like I already said. Hooch was drinking with them and bragging 'bout it being him that thought up the joke. After while when the boys was all feeling good and gitting kind of noisy he thought up another idea. He gits about a dozen of the boys together and gits them to go out and git their cars and to all start going round the block in different directions and come past Willie's corner often as they could. Hooch, he says that's how to make a real traffic cop out of Willie. He says Willie's had several dull days on the job and they owe it to him to give him some real traffic to work on like he was on Michigan Boulevard or Fifth Avenue or Broadway.

He tells them, like I say, to give Willie a taste of real traffic, and that's sure what they did. I never see nothing like it in this place before. Three, four cars'd come tearing down the street from one direction, and three, four more from another all racing their engines and blowing their horns and acting like they was going to

smash into each other and run right over Willie. He stood his ground there at first and held out his arms and tooted his horn and tried to stop them and keep them regulated. But they didn't pay no 'tention to him, and presently they had him worried and dodging all over the street. Some of the boys was purty drunk by now, and it was all Willie could do to keep from gitting hit. They 'most run him to death and was gitting wilder and wilder with all the fun and laughing and a couple of fellers'd finally bumped each other and tore off their fenders when something happened and kind of stopped the fun.

Seems like some kind of a society of Montana Pioneers had been holding their big yearly meeting in to the Falls. I guess you gentlemen must of read about it in the papers. After the meeting was over three of the old-timers that'd come back from California that'd been good friends of Old Alex Millen got in a car and drove up here. This old feller I already told you about, Old Milo Harmsworth, he was one of them. I guess they thought they'd take a look at their old stamping grounds as long as they was this close. Maybe too they thought they'd check up on Old Alex's boy, Willie, and see that he was gitting along all right.

From the way they talked later, I guess it'd made them feel kind of down hearted and mean, riding up here past all the barb wire fences and wheat fields, and seeing how the country had changed and how there wasn't nobody here now but strange folks that'd come in in the last twenty years. I guess they still kind of felt it was their country, they having helped take it away in the first place from the buffalo and the Injuns. I figger there was some excuse for the way they acted and talked, and the way they insulted me even. I said as much to the fellers here in the pool hall later when they was feeling sore and mad. It was like I said, there wasn't nothing left round here to remind them of the old cattle days 'cept them 'dobe buildings and Willie Millen.

Anyway these three old-timers come into town in a car with a feller from the Falls they'd got to drive them. They come down Main Street just when the excitement and laughing and hollering was at its height. I guess at first they must of thought it was a fire or a riot or something.

They had their driver pull up to the curb here in front of my place and stop while they got out and sized up the ruckus. Seemed like a minute or two before they recognized Willie, him being so busy and so covered with sweat and dust. I guess what they recognized first was his cowboy git-up. Anyway, when they recognized him and see what devilment was up, they got madder'n hell.

Old Milo Harmsworth that I already mentioned, he was the spryest—a old feller past eighty but six foot tall and still straight as a string with a big old mop of white hair. He went right out in the street in all that hullabaloo and got Willie. Willie didn't want to come even when he recognized the old man. He didn't want to leave his post when they was so much traffic.

But Old Milo just brought him along and into the pool hall and the other two come with him. They was trying to find out from Willie what it was all about. Willie couldn't say nothing 'cept there'd been a meeting and he'd been made traffic cop and look at his star to prove it. The old feller wanted to know who it was give him the job, and Willie pointed out Hooch that'd been here in the pool hall all the time watching the fun through the window.

WELL, SIR, you should of heard that old boy tear into Hooch. Hooch, he's got a purty mean tongue in his head hisself. He's been round considerable, I guess, and lived kind of rough, and got kind of hard and prosperous and cocky in the business he's been in here. Anyway he starts to talk right back at first, asking Old Milo what the hell business it is of his. But Old Milo just kind of bores him through with them steady old eyes of his, and Hooch he backs down right quick and takes the worst tongue lashing off the old man I ever hear a feller git.

The fellers that's been out in the street pestering Willie, they've put up their cars and crowded into the hall to hear Hooch catch hell, and now they come in for their share of the cussing too. Old Milo tells them they look to him like a bunch of nesters and cattle rustlers and horsethieves. No, he says, they ain't nothing so manly as that. They're just hick farmers and hired men that've come in here and ruined the world's best cattle country. Not content with that they got to go and try to make a fool out of the son of the man that was the maker of this whole part of Montana. If it hadn't been for old Alex Millen, he says, there wouldn't none of them dared live in this country. They'd still be forking manure back in Minnesota and Nebraska and Ioway.

Say, didn't he give everybody a cussing? Standing there with his back agin the bar straight as an arrow, telling the fellers what he thought about them in a fierce, cold voice. He got back to Hooch ag'in. He's figgered out some way the kind of business Hooch is in. I don't know that he really knows nothing 'bout Hooch gitting the stuff off'n the fellers up in the mountains and running it into the Falls. But he figgers he's one of these fellers that's got a easy way of making a living. Them other two old boys stand alongside Old Milo, backing him up, with their old eyes running over that crowd, cold and steady, like they was hoping somebody'd start something.

Old Milo got through at last and turned his back on the crowd, and the other two and Willie faced around, and Old Milo ordered a drink. I told him I didn't have nothing but near beer—I didn't serve nothing stronger'n that in this place. Then he tore into me too. Hell, he says to the others, even the bartenders round here've got to be damned hypocrites and liars. I let it pass even if I ain't no bartender, but the proprietor of Eddie's Pastime Parlors.

Well, they left right after that, taking Willie with them. I hear they went out in their car to take a look at one or two of the old ranches. Seemed like 'most everybody in the pool hall was feeling kind of took back, all 'cept Hooch. He just laughed in a funny kind of way, and said there ought to be guardeens for doddering old fools like that in their second childhood.

The three of them and Willie come back 'bout six o'clock and all four had supper together up to the restaurant. They bought Willie a lot of things at the store, and arranged to git a new roof put on the 'dobe building where he was living before they drove back to the Falls. I hear that there when they was eating supper they was trying to git Willie to pick up and go away with them and they'd git him a better place to live. But Willie didn't want to go. Said he felt more to home here, and they figgered maybe he did at that, and fixed him up like I say, and went on back to the Falls.

There was a big dance in town that night, and Hooch was purty busy taking care of the boys. I guess some of them joked him purty hard about what'd happened in the afternoon. He must of slept all day Sunday. Anyway he wasn't around. Willie was around all day, not hardly knowing what to do. He'd understood enough about the fuss to figger he wasn't to go on with his traffic cop job.

I figgered the joke was played out, and I guess the other fellers did too. We'd had a lot of good laughs and plenty of fun out'n it.

Hooch come round ag'in Monday afternoon when the regular bunch was loafing round the hall. Willie was up front by the window. He'd gone back to his horse hair braiding.

THE FELLERS started joking Hooch 'bout how the old boy had jumped him, and how he'd backed down and took water. They said they guessed now maybe Hooch wasn't so chesty 'bout his joke. Hooch come back at them mean and nasty. Said they was all in on it as much as him. Said he hadn't took water. Said he'd kept quiet there when the old

man was after him on account of respect for age and on account of there only being three of the old fellers agin a whole crowd. Said Old Milo wasn't nothing but a old fool that'd lost his sense of humor. Said he hadn't scared him, not a bit. Said for them to shut up their yapping, he'd show them he could do anything he wanted to with Willie.

Then he went up front to where Willie was and he jumped on him real ornery and snarling. He said Willie'd certainly been a hell of a failure as a traffic cop. Here they'd give him the job and trained him, and he'd fell down on the job the first time he got a little real traffic to handle. He'd got the traffic all mixed up and then'd run away and left the job for which they'd elected him. He jumped on Willie so hard he 'most had him crying.

Hooch goes on and says it's evident Willie ain't man enough to handle traffic. But he's going to give him one last chance. A traffic cop, he says, has got two kinds of duties. One's to direct traffic and the other's to stop crime. Willie's fell down on the first, and he's going to give him his last chance on the second. He's going to let him go back to his job only he's to stand out there in the street nights and stop the rum runners that are coming through this way from up over the Canadian border.

You couldn't help but laugh when Hooch he said that. You had to give it to him. I guess he'd thought it up over Sunday. There ain't no rum run in here from over the Canadian border. It don't pay when you can buy moon so cheap right up in the mountains. That's the only running here, bringing the stuff in from the mountains, and peddling it into the Falls. Everybody has to laugh when Hooch says that about rum running. When it comes to the only kind that goes on here, Hooch knows more about that than anybody else.

Hooch tells Willie he can take it or leave it. Here's his last chance. If he wants to hold on to his job and his star he's got to git out there at the corner tonight as soon as it gits dark, and stay on duty there stopping rum runners until daylight.

Willie's felt real bad, like I say, at being jumped on. He's glad of another chance and all excited about the new part of his job. He says he'll stop the rum runners. When he comes on duty that night he'll bring his gun. He'll stop them if he has to shoot them. He says he's got just the gun for it to home, a old, silver mounted, double barreled, muzzle loading shotgun that his daddy brought with him when he first come to this country. Willie says he's already got it loaded up good with buckshot, ready for a coyote that'll now and ag'in come sneaking down a coulee back of his house. Buckshot, Willie says, is just the thing for rum runners.

That kind of sobers us down. It's funny all right, thinking of Willie standing out there in the dark all night with his old muzzle loader waiting for Canadian rum runners. But there's a chance he may let fly and hurt somebody.

Yes, sir. We thought about that then. We thought about it and somebody started to say something. But Hooch told him to shut up. He told Willie to be on the job that night at dark. Then he got us off to one side, and got us to keep Willie busy here while him and Shorty Flynn they sneaked off up to Willie's house and got the old gun and took her out back of town and shot her off and then loaded her up ag'n with nothing but wads on top of the powder.

Well, Willie went on duty that night with his old gun and a lantern Hooch'd got him. He sure looked funny standing out there in the dark street all alone waiting to stop some crime. I seen him there the last thing when I closed up shop and went home.

Willie wasn't round all the next morning. I guess he was home gitting some sleep after being up almost all night. He come round in the afternoon, and said there hadn't been no rum runners come through during the night. Said there hadn't been no one come through at all. Seemed like he had something he wanted

to tell about having saw the coyote when he went home 'long about sunup, but the boys was all busy talking and he didn't git a chance to say no more'n that.

That night Willie's back on his job soon as it's dark. Hooch ain't round to git a laugh out'n it like he was the night before. He'd took his car and gone up in the mountains. It wasn't on business like you heard some folks claim. The stuff they found in the car was only four, five bottles he was carrying with him just for him and the girl.

YES, SIR, that stuff they found in the car was just a few bottles for him and the girl. It's my opinion that story she told was straight all right. You take them young breed girls like you'll find them living with their folks up in the mountains, and they're too dumb to make up a lie.

It was like she said, all right. He'd met her along the road some time before when she was berry picking and he was up on business, and he'd been playing sweet on her since, and'd finally got her to sneak off with him to the Falls where he was going to buy her some clothes and show her a good time going to the movies and living swell for two, three days.

Yes, sir. It was like the girl said, he was taking her in to the Falls. He must not of got her until some time after dark when her folks'd gone to bed. Anyway, it was 'most 'leven o'clock and I was about ready to run out the fellers and close up when he come along. I figure he must of been feeling so good at finally gitting the girl to go along with him that he wasn't thinking nothing at all 'bout Willie or having put him out there on the corner to stop crime. If he did think about him he wasn't aiming to pay no 'tention to him.

It'd been drizzling since nine o'clock, and you couldn't see much. Willie must of seen the headlights though when Hooch swung on to Main Street 'way down there at the end. He must of seen the lights and been all set for them. Hooch couldn't of seen Willie till he got 'most on him.

Like I say, gentlemen, I was just about to close up the place when I hear the noise of the car and then hear old Willie yell "Halt!" I guess Hooch must of been took by surprise his own self. Probably he didn't want to stop right there in the street with the girl and have everybody see what he was up to. Maybe he wanted to have some fun with Willie. Anyway he must of kept right on a-coming, 'cause Willie yells "Halt!" ag'in, and then his old muzzle loader lets go—*Bam! Bam!*

It kind of startled us at first, and everybody kind of jumped. Yes, sir! I 'member everybody kind of jumped and looked scared. *Bam! Bam!*, the old gun went off all of a sudden out there in the dark. Then the girl commenced to scream.

We just stood there for a minute. It sounded bad, them two shots and then that girl a-screaming and a-screaming. We just stood there. Then Shorty Flynn let out a big laugh, and the rest of us all joined him.

"Haw-haw!" Shorty says. "Haw-haw! I guess Willie's got his rum runner!"

That was when we run out into the street. We all run out in the street then, and right away we recognized it was Hooch's big car. It'd run on past the corner and up over the sidewalk and'd stopped with one headlight smashed up agin Richey's store. Willie was standing there beside it, with his gun still in his hand, holding up his lantern and looking in at the driver's seat. The girl was a-screaming and a-screaming.

We commenced running into the broken glass before we got to the car. That was when we begin to worry something's happened. Broken glass laying there in the street. When we got to the car the windshield was all busted. The girl was cut some by the glass, but she wasn't bad hurt. Hooch was laying there the way we left him and the way the coroner says he found him.

Willie'd let him have both barrels right through the windshield when he didn't stop. He must of had a half a handful of

buckshot in each barrel. He said he figgered the old gun was playing out and not shooting so good that morning when he'd follered up the coyote that he seen sneaking down the coulee when he come off duty, and'd got two shots at it at a hundred feet and missed. He said he reloaded her good and heavy.

No, sir. Like I said, we hadn't no mind any harm would come of it. You can ask Shorty Flynn or any of the fellers there if that ain't the truth. Hooch there hisself, I bet, if you could ask him, would tell you the same, that we hadn't no mind any harm would come of it.

Like I say, it was just a joke.

ANIMALS AFLOAT

By LAWRENCE G. GREEN

PARROTS, the hard abandoned tribe that curses like buccaneers and respects neither captain nor chaplain, are still the joy of a sailor's life at sea. On board a small gunboat in Table Bay Docks the other day I found these tough customers in every cabin and mess—literally hundreds of them.

The gunboat had just arrived from a long West African cruise. In the ports of the grim West Coast the crew had bought the parrots uncaged, so the problem of keeping their pets out of mischief arose immediately.

Every store in the ship was raided, and cages were made of wood, tin, wire, rope and even string. The boatswain's mate reached the limit of ingenuity when he turned out a cage of marlin spikes. Even then many parrot owners had to secure the legs of their pets with string.

The little gunboat made heavy weather of it on the run to the Cape, and the language of the mess decks was soon learned by the parrots. Several birds could imitate the boatswains' pipes with such skill that there were many false alarms.

"Show a leg," some would scream well before daylight.

"Clear lower deck," others would growl at awkward moments.

"Drunk again," a few would sometimes greet the captain.

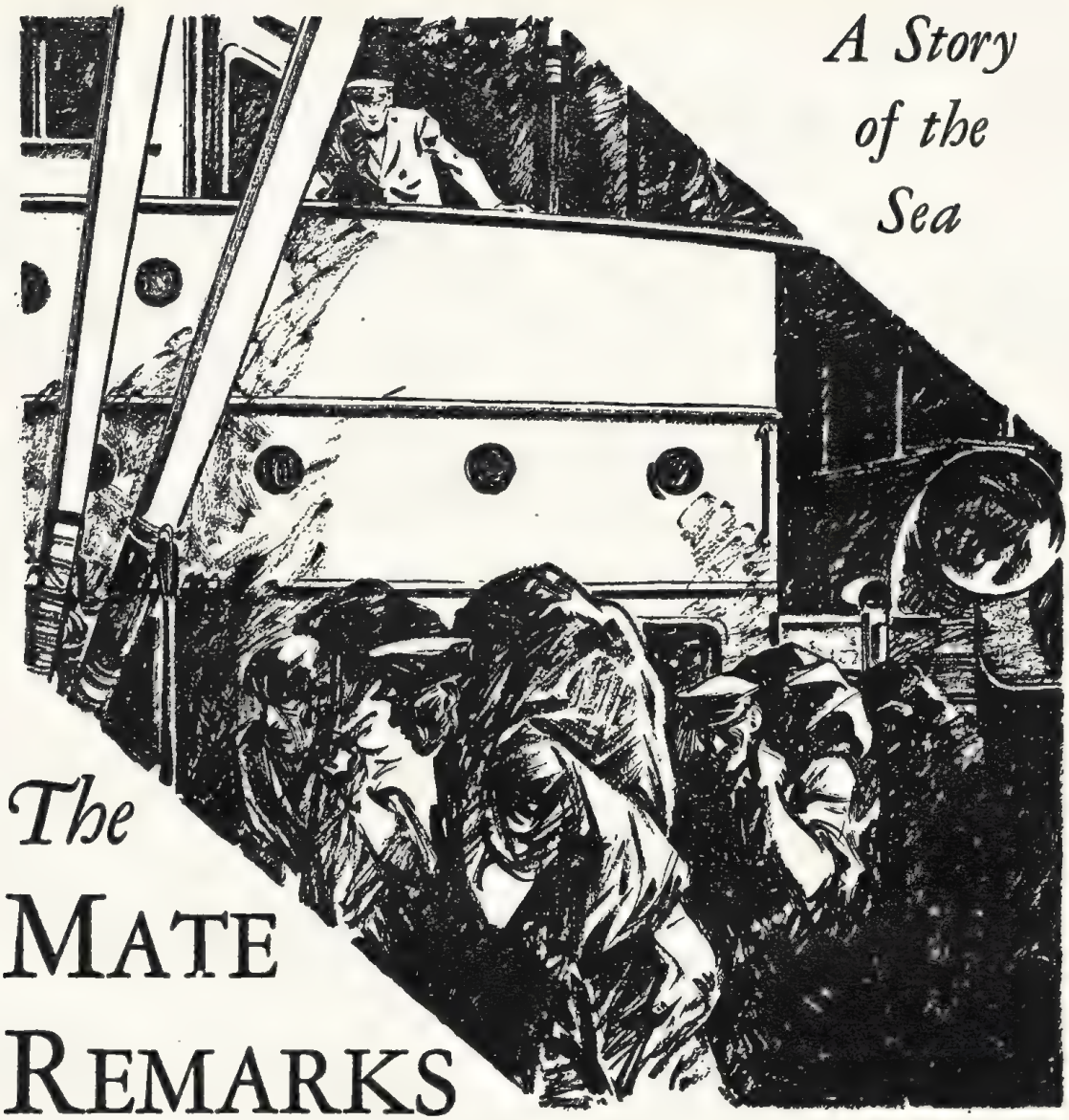
And during prayers there would be realistic sounds of cork pulling.

Nearly every ship carries a cat, while liners sometimes have two dozen cats as rat and mouse catchers. These seagoing cats are a mysterious breed. A cat will make its home in a ship for a year, vanish at a foreign port and then rejoin again at some other port thousands of miles away.

Irish terriers are welcomed on board ship, for they, too, work their passages by keeping down the number of rats. Most seagoing dogs possess a queer instinct of smelling land, and masters of small vessels approaching a coast in foggy weather will sometimes send a dog on to the forecastle head to keep a lookout.

The faintest dog bark from the shore, inaudible to human ears, will be heard by the dog watcher, and the answering bark is the warning to go hard astern and make for open water.

Penguins are amusing, but you seldom find them in steamers. Monkeys are the favorite pets of the seaman. How many thousands have been kidnapped from tropical jungles to provide laughter for weary men during the watch below at sea?



A Story of the Sea

The MATE REMARKS

By ALBERT RICHARD WETJEN

YES [said the mate] I know what they say. I'm supposed to be pretty hard boiled, and if it comes right down to it maybe I am. When you've had to fight your own way, left an orphan at ten, sent to sea at thirteen, taken your ticket at eighteen, you don't exactly grow up sweet and angelic. And then in this day and age you've *got* to act hard boiled. What with the sort of tripe they send down from the office to sign on, and all the newfangled ideas of giving seamen three watches for'ard and such, you'd get nothing done unless you manhandled and cussed a bit.

It wasn't so bad before the war now, when you got A.B's that were A.B's, but it seems like these days all the real sailors have died off or retired. All you can get to sign on are rah-rah boys, college kids wanting a pleasure cruise during vacation, or gangsters dodging the police. I've

been mate these fifteen years and I'll swear whenever I find a man for'ard who can splice and steer I think I'm in luck . . . Pass the bottle.

You'll remember the times when men would join a packet rolling drunk and cussing, packing their seachests, spitting tar and ginger? Salty boys! You'd have to wade into half a dozen fights before you could get a watch standing by, but once they were licked into shape you had men that were men. Tough, but they earned their pay. What is it you see now when a ship's due to sail? A bunch of narrow spined lads in ice cream pants and white shoes, coming up the gangway dead sober and carrying suitcases and Kodaks. Rah-rah boys! And if it isn't them it's some gangster, sliding aboard with a hand inside his jacket and his eyes shining like a snake's.

Yes, I've handled mutinies and I've been wrecked a couple of times. I've made wads of jack at salvage and once I ran guns into Chile. But the most grief I ever had wished on me was when I was mate of the old *Kincairn Abbey*. Something happened every day and I'm telling you that if I hadn't been a hard boiled old-timer with a lot of fool ideas about duty, that packet would never have got home!

We signed in Philadelphia. It was just after the war and I got a crowd of gangsters, a few college kids wanting adventure, and some Tennesseans who'd been working in the shipyards and sort of figured they'd see a bit more of the world before scooting back to their stills. Not a man of all the crowd seafaring for the love of it or because it was his trade. Just a mob wanting to go some place. Enough to make you sick! . . . Pass the bottle.

The Tennesseans were an ignorant bunch. There was one man named Bartlett who caused most of the grief, and he couldn't read or write his own name. First day out I told him to stick a bulb in an electric cluster and I'll be damned if he didn't back off.

"I ain't doin' nothin' like that," he said. "I don't know nothin' about them things."

I figured he was kidding me at first, but he stuck tight. He was straight scared to screw that bulb in and all the cussing in the world wouldn't budge him. I suppose back in his home roost he'd never come across electricity and he just didn't intend to monkey with something he didn't savvy. You'd have thought he'd have learned something in the shipyards, but he hadn't. I'm not kidding you about it either. He just wouldn't touch that bulb. I found out later the rest of the bunch were about as crazy, but it was too late. I'd signed 'em as A.B's.

Well, anyway, we left Philly for London and Antwerp. There was a new skipper who came aboard the day we sailed and I soon discovered he was going to be a bunch of grief too. He came up the gangway soused to the gills and he stayed soused most of the voyage. If I'd have let him have his way with the *Kincairn Abbey* he'd have put her ashore half a dozen times before we cleared the coast. But I watched things pretty closely and I saved him his ticket.

Soused did I say? He was crazy as well. He'd come on the bridge at odd times and give a lot of fool orders and then get mad because they weren't carried out. I saw to that. The second and third mates were just kids, war time officers, and I gave them a heart to heart talk right off. They needed it. The Old Man's first order was something about a blue beetle he could see sitting on the main truck. He wanted the second mate to go up and bring it down to him. The second would have gone, too, if I hadn't arrived. The kid had never seen any one with the willies before and he was scared stiff. But that doesn't matter. I told him to pay no attention to any one but me and I saw to it that a case of whisky was always left around the skipper's room. I had hopes he'd finish himself off. He didn't, as a matter of fact, but he managed to spend most of the time below, which helped.

The first night we were at sea I went up to relieve the Second at four and found him white and shaking, hiding in the chart room with all the lights turned on and a big Navy revolver in his hand.

"Well," I said, "what the hell's wrong with you?"

"There's ghosts aboard, sir," he sort of whimpers.

I smelled his breath to see if he'd been drinking, but he was cold sober and trembling like a leaf. I took his gun away and shook him until he could talk some more.

"About three o'clock, sir," he says. "I seen something going for'ard. It was like a big man with a hump on his back, and right after him there were three other men—all dark and slinky, sir. I hollered but they just vanished away. And then awhile ago—just about one bell, sir—I saw them again. A big man with a hump on his back and three men dodging after him."

I did a lot of cussing after that. There might be some of the men trying to broach cargo but we had nothing below but steel and iron goods—rails, machinery and such—too big to be shifted. Of course the crew lived aft on the *Kincairn Abbey* and had no business for'ard after dark. But ghosts! I told the second he was crazy. For that matter we had no humpbacked man on board.

"That's just it," he insisted. "It's ghosts, sir."

I told him to chase off and get some sleep, and I thought no more about the matter. A young officer's liable to see all sorts of things in the middle watch, especially if he's got too much imagination. I can remember when I was Second of the *Mithras*—but never mind. When I turned the crew to at six the next morning I discovered half of 'em were drunk, and that gave me a lot more worry than any ghosts there might be around.

I had the bosun up and asked him where the men had got their liquor from, but he says he doesn't know. There wasn't much satisfaction in an answer like that, because a bosun's supposed to know, so I got the second mate out of his bunk and together we went through the focsle. We found half a dozen pints of white liquor and this we pitched overside.

"That's that," I told the second. "We'll have no more sousing at sea."

THE SECOND didn't see any ghosts the next night, probably because the skipper was on the bridge most of the middle watch, telling him about a pink rat he'd found in his room and which he was training to do the Highland Fling. I came up at four to discover the two of them, the Second and the Old Man, resting on the chart room settee and talking like clockwork. At least the Old Man was talking, the Second was looking pretty white about the gills and just saying, "Yes, sir," and "I see, sir," very nervously. I bawled him out about not keeping watch and then chased him off to his room. Lord, if we'd hit something! . . . The ship was right in the traffic lanes . . . The Old Man wanted to tell me about the pink rat but I got him to take a good swig of whisky and then helped him into his bunk. It was one bell before I got back on the bridge again and I'll be damned if I didn't see them ghosts myself.

It was still dark, you understand, and the deck was all sort of shadowy and black, there being no moon and a thin scud covering the stars. I was watching the lights of a big freighter coming up from the south and then I heard what seemed like a shoe hitting a ringbolt, which brought my eyes down to the foremast winches. And then I saw the loom of a humpbacked figure sliding along by the rail and faintly outlined against the white wash on the water alongside. It disappeared almost immediately, going aft, and I thought I caught sight of two other figures, crouched down and following it. Ghosts, hell!

I went down the companion in two jumps, got on the main deck and ran for'ard, figuring I'd run into whoever it was prowling about. But they were too

quick for me. I heard a faint whistle and the noise of shoes running along the planking. By the time I'd located the exact spot where the noise was coming from it was too late. I caught a glimpse of some one dodging round the corner of the engineer's house and when I reached there the deck was as silent and deserted as a tomb. I gave it up and went back to the bridge, and I said nothing to the second mate about what I'd seen. He was jumpy enough as it was.

Well, the next night the third mate reports to me that some of the men seem to be making a playground out of the foredeck after dark. He hadn't seen any humpbacked figure but he did say there was a lot of quiet running around. The following night the Second reports his ghosts again and I began to get pretty hot under the collar. None of the crew had any business for'ard of the mainmast after dark, except the wheel and lookout reliefs, so I figured I'd have a heart to heart talk with the nighthawks who were disturbing my delicate mates.

Just as soon as it was six o'clock and time for the watch to wash down, I went aft and had a shock. Two of the watch was laid out in their bunks, soused to the tonsils, and half of the rest were weaving like dories in a choppy sea. The bosun himself was awash, giggling like a fool, and nothing I could do would make him loosen up as to where the stuff was coming from. It was all I could do to keep my hands off the crowd of them, and I'd have had 'em legged anyway if the skipper had been sober enough himself to do it. As it was I searched the foscle again and couldn't find a thing. It was pretty clear some one was peddling booze aboard and had a lot of it cached. And it was just as clear that the humpbacked ghost had a finger in the pie . . . Pass the bottle.

Well, another day passed without much happening, except the skipper decided to sober up and had a bad attack of the willies. He spent all the forenoon training his pink rat and all the afternoon taking pot shots at it with his revolver. I broke in his door, got the gun away from him and put him to bed with a shot of dope from the medicine chest. This happened about six bells, three o'clock, and when I came out on deck again I found all the men grouped together, talking in low tones and looking scared.

"Ghosts, sir," some one remarks. "The damned ship's haunted!"

I was just about to order the whole bunch back to work when there comes the queerest sort of wail from for'ard you ever heard. It sounded like a dying calf and what with one thing and the other I had my hair standing on end right away. None of the men would move so I did a lot of cussing to show them I wasn't scared and I poked along for'ard to try and locate the noise. But it didn't come again and so I ordered all hands aft and tried to forget the matter.

ABOUT five bells, two-thirty the next morning, the second mate busts into my room with a yell that was enough to wake the dead. When I felt his hands groping around my head in the darkness I figured one of the men was trying to croak me or something and I lets loose a sizzler that drops the Second choking into a corner. Then I landed out of the blankets with a gun in my fist and switched on the light to get a look around. The Second was sitting up against the bulkhead, gasping like a stranded fish, his eyes popping and his face the color of a sheet. He starts to wave his hands and say something, and about that time the Tennessean named Bartlett pokes his head inside the doorway, and he's looking mighty sick too.

"There's a dead man up there," he says, jerking his thumb for'ard.

I wanted to know what in hell he meant and what business he had prowling midships at this time of the morning.

"In the forepeak," moans the Second, trying to get to his feet. "There's a dead man, sir."

"Well," I said, "why in hell don't you drag him out? If he's dead I can't do anything."

The Second rolls his eyes but says no

more. I was already getting dressed because when any one comes to the mate's room with that sort of story it means he's got to attend to things himself. I gathered, while I hauled on my pea jacket, that Bartlett had been down in the forepeak and had seen a body lying on some old mattresses there. I hadn't time right then to inquire what Bartlett was doing down in the forepeak at two-thirty in the morning, nor how he happened to have a key. But I made a note of the matter.

The crew all seemed to be up and dressed, and some of them were half-drunk, too. The bosun came from aft carrying an electric cluster but he wouldn't take it for'ard, so I grabbed it from him and went along myself, with the second mate following at a distance and the rest of the crowd hanging back behind him. The hatch was off the forepeak, which was entered from under the focsle head, and the padlock was lying to one side with a key still in it.

I dropped the cluster down the hatch but could locate nothing, so I shinned down the spider ladder after making the Second hold the cluster so I could see. There was only some old canvas and a few old hawsers in the first deck so I made the Second come down and stand there while I went lower. The tween decks held some drums of paint and oil, some new canvas, spare hanks of twine, holystones and so forth. But I couldn't see anybody there either. The Second didn't want to come down any lower but I told him if he didn't I'd come up after him, so when he finally stood beside me, shaking like a leaf, I went on down the last ladder and into the lower hold.

The first thing my foot struck was a hurricane lamp lying on its side and out, though the wick was still smoldering and smoke was coming from it. The second mate started to lower the cluster and then spotting something behind me he dropped it with a yell. I just had time for a glimpse of his bulging eyes and then the cluster hit my shoulder and smashed on the steel deck, while the Second went racing up to the focsle head and I was left in complete darkness, for the fall had broken all the cluster's bulbs.

I was a scared man, I can tell you. What it was the Second had seen I had no idea, but I got to thinking of the ghosts he'd talked about, and that funny wailing noise we'd heard, and the sweat ran down my face. I stood there in that damned darkness, with the hull all creaking as the packet lifted and sank to the sea, and I just braced myself in case something jumped me while my skin was all crawling like snakes was on it.

After a bit, when nothing happened, I bent down and got hold of the hurricane lamp lying by my foot. I had some trouble to find a match but eventually I got that lamp lighted and was able to look around—I'm not saying how I was shaking either . . . Anyway, the first thing I saw was what looked like a corpse stretched out on a pile of rusty iron bed springs that had been ditched in the forepeak when the *Kincairn Abbey* quit running troops to France. This corpse was sort of resting on one shoulder and its face was turned toward me, all white and drawn and cold looking, with a ragged black beard covering the jaws.

I stood for awhile after that, and then I noticed the light was shining in the corpse's eyes and presently they blinked and I heard a moan. I'll be damned then if the corpse didn't come to life. It sort of wriggled to its knees and flopped toward me. A couple of cold hands grabbed at mine and started to carry it to the corpse's mouth. I figured he was going to bite me and I snapped to life with a jerk, kicking him off and swearing at him to relieve my own feelings a bit, and also to let the Second know I was still alive. He was staring down from the hatchway above.

"What is it, sir?" he calls down, very shaky.

I'd used up all the cuss words I could think of. What the hell did he think it was? A stowaway, of course. Starved and crazy and weak as a kitten. Tried to bite me, too. The Second disappeared after that and presently came back with a line

which he dropped down to me. I made a running bowline fast under the stowaway's arms, and kicked him every time he made a grab for my hand. He was in a bad way all right, had evidently been cooped up below since we'd left Philly. His black hair was all tousled over his wild twitching eyes, his fingers were like claws, his cheeks all hollow and clammy and he could only make queer dry noises in his throat. Needed water, I figured. He made another grab at my hand as he was hoisted up, trying to bite it, and I was certain he was out of his head.

I had him taken up on the boat deck, shot some whisky into him and tried to get his legs to work by letting him hang on to one of the boats and sort of move his feet around. After a bit he could totter a few steps so I hauled him to a spare room near the galley, planked some bread and milk before him and locked him in. None of the men would touch him at all.

Well, the next think I did was to get after Bartlett, but he wouldn't let out a bleat as to how he happened to be down in the forepeak that time of night. I questioned the other hands but they wouldn't talk either and before we sat down to breakfast that morning I was mad enough to wade into the bunch of them. Figure it out for yourself. There I was the only officer on board who was fit to be left alone. The Second and Third were useless, good kids but young and inexperienced. The skipper had the D. T's and was full of dope. The engineers were fair men enough but they had all they could do to handle their own department. And the whole crew, seamen, firemen and stewards, were on a permanent drunk, with the source of supply a mystery. Add to all that the stowaway and the prowling about the decks of nights and you can figure how pleased I was . . . Pass the bottle.

THE STOWAWAY was a freak, all right. He jabbered some sort of lingo that no one could understand and whenever I wasn't looking and he was around he'd make a pass at my hands and try to bite them. I didn't like to keep him locked up all the time, for apart from his biting idea he seemed sensible enough, so I put him to work in the galley, peeling spuds and cleaning the pots. He seemed quite pleased about it too. How he ever got on the ship in Philly, and why, was something I never did clear up. He was there, that was all.

Things went along pretty good for another couple of days, except for the men drinking. I searched the focsle several times, on unexpected occasions, but I never found more than a pint or so of the stuff around and the source of supply was as much a mystery as ever. I got sort of resigned to the situation, stopped bothering about ship's work, and figured that as soon as we go to London I'd pay the whole bunch off and ship me a real crew, if there was such a thing around. As long as I could find one man in a watch sober enough to steer, and another who could see good enough to keep a lookout, I felt I ought to be satisfied, considering all things. I lost a lot of weight though and I took my sleep in cat naps of an hour or so each. I didn't dare leave the deck to the Second or Third any longer than that. The skipper was drinking again and had stopped seeing his pink rats and his blue beetles for awhile, but he was useless as far as managing the ship was concerned.

Early in the first dog watch, on the second day after I'd located the stowaway, I went below to stuff some supper into me while the third mate had the bridge. I'd just about reached the end of the soup when a gun goes off aft and I nearly swallowed my spoon. Before I could jump up another gun goes off and then a regular bombardment. The bosun bumped into me as I came out of the saloon, and he tells me that Bartlett the Tennessean is killing all hands. I grabs my own gun out of my room and goes aft on the jump.

The focsle was full of smoke when I got there. One man was lying dead in the middle of the deck and the rest were all crowded back against the bunks with Bartlett swearing fit to bust and waving a

gun about promiscuous. As soon as he sees me he draws down and fires and I got all braced for the lead. But he'd shot the gun empty and as soon as he discovered that he threw it at me and followed it up. He was as crazy as a loon and took no notice of my own gun which I had him covered with. I didn't want to drill him so I stepped to one side and slams him hard with my butt, flopping him cold. I'd brought the irons along with me and I clamped them over Bartlett's wrists and began asking questions. Then I got the story, for the crowd was all too scared to hedge about things now, and I was feeling pretty ugly. They took one look at my gat and began all talking at once.

It seems Bartlett and his two pals, more Tennesseans, had brought aboard a lot of liquor they'd made in Philly, with the idea of selling it to the crew. The rest of the boys fell for the idea at first, and then, running short of cash, figured they might locate Bartlett's supply and lift the lot. Bartlett got wind of this and changed his hiding place every night. It was him with his sack of booze which the second mate saw and thought was a humpbacked man. The men following him were some of the others trying to locate his new hiding place, and it seemed like every one played hide and seek all over the deck every night, Bartlett's pals laying a false trail and sometimes tangling with the boys who tried to follow Bartlett. The reason Bartlett had gone down into the forepeak that particular night—and the devil knows where he got a key from—was to stow his booze there while his pals hid two sacks stuffed with paper in an old water tank atop the fiddley, letting the rest of the crowd see them do it. Bartlett had figured on stowing his booze in the lower hold of the forepeak and so had spotted the stowaway.

The direct cause of the shooting was because the crowd had eventually discovered the booze, got wise to Bartlett's pals putting down a false scent. When Bartlett found all his supply was scattered about the focsle he wanted them to pay for it, which they wouldn't do, and couldn't do. So being a crazy Tennessean he gets mad and goes for his gun. Plugs the man he thinks rifled his cache. So that was that. I searched the focsle and pitched every pint overside I could find, gave the boys a currying down and took Bartlett midships with me . . . Pass the bottle.

I HAULED Bartlett up to the bridge and ironed him to a stanchion outside the skipper's door, while I went in to talk with the Old Man and try to get some sense into him. It wasn't much good. He was up and walking about, talking to himself and drunk as a fool. He says to me, very tragic like:

"I can't stand the disgrace. I've got to kill myself."

And then I saw he was fiddling with his open razor. What he needed, I told him, was another drink, and I poured a big slug out for him.

He started to argue but I'd got to the stage where four gold bands didn't mean much any more, so I took the razor away from him, held him with one hand—he was a little man—and poured the whisky down his gullet until he began to splutter and choke and eventually decided he wanted to lay down. He was out cold almost before he hit the bunk. I searched his cabin after that and took all the whisky I could find down to my own room and locked it up. The way things had happened there'd be an inquiry sure, and I didn't want my ticket scratched off. It was up to me now to see the skipper was present in the dock with his mind clear and his wits all in order. I just had to pull him round.

The next thing that happens, about an hour later, is that I catch one of Bartlett's pals trying to file his irons off. This is about six bells, seven o'clock, and it's beginning to get dark. I jumped Bartlett's pal and he fought back, which told me he was soused and that I hadn't yet found all the liquor there was on board. I was mad as hornet by this time and we had a proper set-to on the bridge, until

I lands a neat swing to the jaw, flop Bartlett's pal and iron him to the stanchion with the other mutineer. I made the second and third mates carry guns for the rest of that night, with orders to plug the first man who showed his nose on the bridge. They did, too. I said they were fool kids. They took a pot at me once and nearly blew the head off the first wheel relief. However, I straightened things out and no one was injured. It's a wonder I wasn't bugs by this time . . . Pass the bottle.

The next morning Bartlett comes to his senses. He'd been shouting and struggling and raving all night, but I figured the cold and the cramps would finally get him down. He starts off to tell me how sorry he is and that he'd killed the other man in self-defense. But I wouldn't let him loose and I wouldn't promise him anything, so he starts to kick and foam around again and hollers that I've got the irons too tight and they're cutting his wrists.

All this performance brought the rest of the crowd midships, and it's plain to me that the remaining Tennessean had been giving them a good line of chatter as well as filling them up on booze again. They looked ugly, believe me! I ordered them aft but they just milled around and then the Tennessean steps out and starts talking about my brutal treatment and states that all that's happened has been my fault. Bartlett and his pal in irons began to holler and scream some more and about that time the skipper comes out of his room.

He was looking pretty shaky and white, but seemed reasonably sober and clear headed—for him. All the men start talking at once and the skipper begins to get important. He ain't got an idea what's happened but he's sore at me now for taking his booze away so he tells me kind of sharp to loosen Bartlett's irons and to take both prisoners into his cabin, where he'll question them. I argued, of course. It was nothing but madness. But I couldn't very well refuse to obey. I had the right as mate to call the other mates in conference and take over the ship, on the ground of the master's disability, but I didn't care to risk it. If the Old Man was to pull himself together and get the crew to stand by him, the inquiry board might land on me with both feet and charge *me* with mutiny. It was a mess, I can tell you.

The skipper wouldn't budge in spite of my swearing and arguing and so I had to loosen Bartlett's irons and the irons on the other man. After I'd done that I turned away for a moment to call the second to come and be a witness at the interview between the mutineers and the skipper, since it looked like I was going to have to do a lot of explaining once we docked. And I wanted to protect my ticket, see?

Well, the next thing I knew there was a lot of yelling and I'm knocked flat on my face.

I doubled up and twisted around on one knee, just in time to see Bartlett standing over me, one iron dangling free and the other still fastened about his wrist. He'd cracked me from behind and he's all set to brain me again. I hadn't a nigger's chance to wriggle clear. The crew were all drunk and egging him on. The skipper was just standing there sort of stupified. Bartlett had his irons raised and I was off my balance and trying to get up.

Then something flops on Bartlett's back and sends him sprawling, and I see that it's the stowaway we'd hauled out of the forepeak.

That gave me a chance to stand up before the general rush came. I saw the skipper knocked sideways, saw the second mate, who'd just come down from the bridge, crumple under a swarm of bodies, and then the mess was at me, all the men swearing and hitting and fighting drunk on the last of the liquor, with the Tennessean leading them on. I made a grab for my gun but there wasn't time to use it. Some one knocked it clear and I was back against the side of the lower bridge bulkhead with a dozen men trying all at once to get at me.

DON'T talk about fights! That was the worst I've ever handled. I used boots and fists and teeth. Bartlett came under my guard once and I got him in the groin, which finished him for awhile. Another of the Tennesseans kicked me in the thigh and I dropped him with a right under the ear. Then it was just *pump! pump! pump!* at a mess of faces. They got me down at last. My left arm broke with a snap that sounded to me like the mainmast had gone. My clothes were ripped clear and a lot of boots started to stamp me to a jelly. I'd have gone out completely in another second, and then the mess clears off and I can see daylight.

There's a wicked *bam-bam!* And then another. Something falls across my legs and I can see it's one of the Tennesseans with a hole between his eyes. Another man's on his knees, spitting blood and holding his chest. The rest are all backed off against the rail and there's my stowaway with my gat in his hand, crouched down like a real fighter and his dark eyes all on fire. There's smoke coming from the gun muzzle and he shouting something in his queer lingo which no one can understand. Not that they needed to. He'd talked plenty with hot lead.

The skipper was down and unconscious, and he'd been trampled bad. The second mate was gasping like a stranded fish against the rail, with his face all bruised. The Third's standing on the lower step of the companion, swinging a shifting spanner but plain scared to come right down. Me! I'm a wreck! It was all I could do to stand, but some one had to take hold.

I rocked over to the stowaway, took the gun from him and told the mob to chase aft and that'd I'd attend to 'em later. They were sobered now and afraid, but whether they'd have tried another rush I don't know. The chief engineer arrived about then, with his three assistants, and they waded through that crowd like a hot poker through cheese. In thirty seconds there wasn't a man on the bridge save the wounded guy and the dead Tennessean.

I had the skipper carried into his room and then I got the chief engineer to set my arm. Between us we fixed up the wounded man but he was as good as dead. He'd got it through the lungs. I sent the chief and the second mate aft to get Bartlett and his pal and throw them into a spare cabin midships, and about that time the third mate hollers there's a destroyer coming up on the beam.

It wouldn't have mattered much if she hadn't arrived. We were in the Channel already and I figured I could have handled the *Kincairn Abbey* for another couple of days. I went up on the bridge and raked over the code flags and I had the Third run a string up. The destroyer came alongside and I had the Third semaphore a message. I was sitting down on a campstool from the chartroom then, waiting for the destroyer's boat to arrive, when that stowaway came creeping up from below. I'd forgotten all about him, but I figured then I ought to thank him at least for saving my life. So I called him and held out my hand, intending to shake with him, but I'll be damned of he doesn't grab it again and try to bite it, so I kicked him off the bridge and flopped back on the stool again. And that's about all.

The destroyer put an officer and half a dozen men aboard to take us up to London. The skipper went into a hospital and Bartlett and some of the others went to jail. I figured I'd get command of the *Kincairn Abbey*, but I didn't. The owners gave me a gold watch and told me I was a first class mate, just the man to stay with them. And they sent another skipper aboard, a friend of the owners'. Which is how things go at sea . . .

The stowaway? That was funny, now. I took him up to the consul and he found some one who could talk his lingo. He was a deserter from some Russian ship and he came from some backwoods in Siberia. I told the consul he was crazy but the consul said he wasn't. He hadn't been trying to bite my hand after all. He'd just been trying to show me how grateful he was. He'd been trying to kiss it! Kiss it! Can you beat that? . . . Pass the bottle!

A Novelette of the

PAWNS OF MURDER

By L. PATRICK GREENE

ALONG the narrow winding trail rode three men. Two heavily laden pack mules ambled placidly behind them. The bush echoed to the jingle of bits and the patter of hoofs.

The sun was just beginning its westering journey. The air was charged with the sweet scent of the *mapani* bush; bees droned their lazy, monotonous note. A honey guide chirped impatiently, flying ahead of the foremost rider, scolding in a high, twittering note because he refused to be turned from the trail to follow the guide to a bee's nest. A gray lourie screamed with a nerve racking reiteration, "Go-away! Go-away! Go-away!"

The three men rode in silence. The first man was a tall, lanky individual, wearing the uniform of the British South African Police. On the left sleeve of his tattered tunic were three frayed and tarnished stripes. He slouched lazily in the saddle, but his seat was that of a born horseman. His face was thin, his jaw strong and dominant; his mouth generous yet firm. The expression in his gray eyes suggested a reasonable understanding of, and sympathy with, the foibles of his fellow men. His nose, if one was to judge by the rest of his face, had been high bridged and aquiline. It had been smashed some time in his early youth so that now it was of almost negroid thickness. As he rode he loaded the chambers of his revolver with cartridges taken from his tunic pocket. As he did so he smiled thoughtfully.

The second man was as tall as the sergeant and much broader. His face was covered by a full, black beard; a soft felt hat was pulled down low over his eyes. He stared fixedly at some point midway between his horse's ears; he held the bridle reins clumsily. On his wrists glistened the steel of handcuffs.

The third man was only a youngster. He wore the uniform of a trooper of the mounted police. The buttons of his tunic glistened like burnished gold and he sat his mount with a stiff, rigid back. His helmet was freshly blancoed; his khaki puttees were wound in that somewhat complicated pattern dearly beloved by the regimental sergeant-major; his cheeks still bore the healthy glow of a more temperate clime—Africa and fever had not yet thinned his blood. He held the bridle reins in his left hand; in his right, exactly in the manner prescribed in the regulations, he carried a rifle.

Most of the time he stared fixedly at the broad back of the man who rode before him, ready to shoot on the instant should that man make any attempt to escape. But there were moments when his concentration wavered and he looked to the right and left of the trail along which they were riding. His imagination peopled the bush veld with herds of elephants; with charging lions; with large, death-dealing snakes and savage warriors on the war path. But always his eyes would come back, with a start, to rest again on the back of the prisoner who rode

before him, and he would inwardly reproach himself for allowing his attention to wander from a man so obviously dangerous that the hard bitten sergeant had been forced to handcuff him.

Gradually the bush growth thinned, and presently the little procession came to a halt in an open space on the bank of a river. It was not a very wide river, it was, in fact, little more than a *spruit*. In the center of a sandy bed trickled a narrow stream of water.

"This is a hell of a place to camp," the sergeant said somewhat apologetically—there was a soft, pleasant drawl in his voice which seemed to be in keeping with

the somnolence of the scene—"and, as a general rule, I wouldn't outspan so early in the day. But I'm tired. I have been trekking pretty hard this last week or two and I reckon we might as well camp here as anywhere else. Now you, Dixon—" he addressed the trooper—"you keep the prisoner covered with that gun of your'n."

Awkwardly—he still held the bridle reins—the trooper brought his rifle up to his shoulder. Dismounting, the sergeant stood for a moment, stretching and yawning.

"All right, youngster," he said presently. "Now you can dismount while I keep him covered."

THE TROOPER dismounted smartly and led his horse up to where the sergeant stood. He was about to pass between that man and the prisoner when the sergeant snapped irritably:

"Go round the back of me, you damned young fool. Don't you know better than to come between a man and his prisoner?"

Flushing with embarrassment, the trooper amended his course, then, holding both his horse and the sergeant's, he stood waiting for further orders.

"All right, Gray," the sergeant growled. "You can dismount now. Careful now. No tricks!"

Clumsily, the prisoner dismounted; his horse joined the other two.

"You sit down there," the sergeant directed, "with your back against that rock, and don't you move. You may think when I got my back turned that you can make a getaway. But don't you believe it."

Silently the prisoner obeyed and sat with his elbows resting on updrawn knees, his head resting on his hands. He looked fixedly on the ground before him.

The sergeant laughed somewhat callously. Then he turned sharply on the trooper.

"Well, what the hell are you standing there for, gawking like a nitwit? Get them horses unsaddled, rub 'em down, knee halter 'em and turn 'em loose to graze."

The trooper obeyed with a will, and the sergeant took the packs off the mules. Then he sat down on a rock opposite the prisoner, expertly rolled a cigaret, lighted it and smoked thoughtfully.

" 'S too bad you ain't more communicative," he remarked in a casual voice. "Sure you won't have a cigaret? Mebbe that'd help the words come."

The prisoner made no reply. He held his hands now between his knees. He was trying to force them apart—trying to break open the handcuffs.

The sergeant smiled.

"You can't do it," he drawled. "An' if you could, what good'd that do you with me an' a smart young trooper there ready to let daylight in you at the first suspicious move you make? You being the desperate man you are, it makes me almighty glad I ran across Trooper Dixon. Hell, though, wasn't he funny? Out on his first patrol an' lost! Lost with the road afore him as plain as the nose on my face. An' that was a good bluff he pulled, trying to let on he wasn't lost at all. Well, I'll never give him away. Better veld men than he'll ever be have been lost in the bush."

The sergeant sighed.

"You're a talkative cuss," he remarked ruefully. "But that wouldn't be so bad if you'd listen to a feller. I'm thinking you ain't heard a word I've said. Believe me, you ought to pay attention to me. Do you a damn sight more good than trying to get them handcuffs off. That, I'm saying, ain't possible 'less you got the key. An' I've got that."

From his tunic pocket he took out the handcuff key and held it tantalizingly before the prisoner's eyes.

"Yeh," he continued, "it's funny, ain't it, what a little's between you an' freedom. That river, now—a kid could spit across it. But, as far as you're concerned, it's as wide as the Zambezi is just above the falls."

The trooper came up.

"I've rubbed the horses down and

turned 'em loose to graze, Sergeant. Is there anything else?"

"No, youngster. Sit down and take it easy."

The trooper hesitated.

"Could I," he asked eagerly, "take my rifle and explore round a bit?"

"For the love o' heaven, what for?"

"I thought I might manage to bag a buck—or a lion."

The sergeant's laughter was gargantuan. He said:

"You won't find no buck and, consequently, no lions, hereabouts. An', take my word for it, you ought to be grateful there ain't no lions. Hell! Ain't there enough ticks about to pester the life out of a man that you want to go looking for other vermin? No, you sit down, your back against this rock so's you can watch the prisoner. We can't take any chances. Come night we'll tie him up proper; but I'm a humane man; it'd be cruel to do that now."

"If you're so damned humane," the prisoner said harshly, "give me something to bind up my wrists. The irons are pinching them."

HE HELD up his hands and the trooper saw that blood was streaming from his wrists.

The sergeant grunted impatiently.

"You've only got yourself to blame for that," he growled. "I told you it was no good to try to break out of them handcuffs—but you would keep on trying. However—" he rose to his feet, the handcuff key between his thumb and forefinger. "Keep your eyes peeled now, Dixon," he said sharply. "I ain't so sure as this ain't a trick of the prisoner's. Keep him covered all the time—an' don't hesitate to shoot. Remember, we're dealing with a murderer."

Dixon jumped with alacrity to his feet. On his face three emotional expressions struggled for the mastery: that of pity for the prisoner, abhorrence of a murderer, and pride in his official duty.

He picked up his rifle—he had placed it carefully against a tree stump—and leveled it at the prisoner.

"All set, Sergeant," he said breathlessly.

The sergeant swore impatiently.

"Hell! What sort of a weapon's that to cover a man at close quarters with? Here—" he drew his revolver from its holster and handed it to the trooper. "Hell, don't point it at me! It's got a tender trigger. An' let's have a look at that rifle of yours." He almost snatched it from the trooper.

"Gawd!" he exclaimed sarcastically. "You're a beauty. She's not loaded."

The trooper flushed.

"I know, Sergeant. We were told on recruits' course never to carry a rifle with the chamber loaded."

"They tell you a lot on recruits' course that you want to forget in a hurry, youngster."

"Anyway, Sergeant," Dixon said defensively, "the magazine's loaded."

"Yes!" the sergeant said dryly. "And the cutoff's closed. Like as not, before you'd done all the things to this gun you'd have to have done, the prisoner'd have been out of range—out of sight, anyway. Oh, well, oughtn't to expect too much of a youngster."

He rested the rifle against the rock on which he had been sitting.

"Now then, Dixon," he said in more genial tones, "on your toes."

He bent over the prisoner and fumbled with the man's wrists.

"I'm goin' to take the cuffs off, youngster," he said. "He's hurt his wrists bad—the damned fool."

As he spoke the sergeant's foot slipped a little and, in order to regain his balance he shifted sidewise. At that moment his body was between the trooper and the man he was supposed to be covering.

There were two sharp clicks as the sergeant turned the key in the locks and the handcuffs sprang apart.

Things happened swiftly then.

The prisoner jumped to his feet, lashing out at the sergeant with his fist. The sergeant staggered back with a cry of

pain, blood streaming from his nose. He lost his balance and reeled into the trooper; and Dixon, in trying to support him, stumbled to his knees, the pistol flying from his grasp.

Meanwhile the prisoner grabbed the rifle and bolted for the river. He leaped down the bank and waded across the narrow stream. There he halted, rifle to shoulder.

"If you come any farther," he shouted to the trooper, who had by this time scrambled to his feet and recovered the revolver, "I'll fire—and I shan't miss."

He backed toward the opposite bank, and disappeared in the jumble of rocks and thin bush.

The trooper emptied the pistol hopelessly at the point where the prisoner had vanished.

He looked up, wild eyed, as the sergeant, a handkerchief to his nose, dropped to the ground beside him.

"Give me some more ammunition," the trooper demanded excitedly.

"What the hell's the good?" the sergeant said in disgusted tones. "You couldn't hit a barn door. An', anyway, he's over the other side."

"But surely," the trooper gasped, "you're not going to let him get away like that?"

"What? *Me* let him get away! That's good coming from you. Hell! If you'd had him covered like I told you, he wouldn't have got away in the first place. An'—"

"You got between me and him, Sergeant."

"What of it? You could have moved, couldn't you? An' not only that, when he did make his getaway you missed him. I'm telling you, youngster, there'll be hell popping when the C. O. hears about this."

Trooper Dixon looked suspiciously close to tears.

"But can't we go after him, Sergeant? There's two of us—"

"And one revolver between us," the sergeant interrupted.

"Anyway," Dixon said stoutly. "We'd be mounted and—"

"No good, youngster," the sergeant said. "This river, now. Don't look much, does it? But it is. It's a boundary river, youngster. Once across that an' you're in Portuguese territory. An' we've got no official standing in Portuguese territory. None whatsoever. If you'd happened to have killed the prisoner when he was safe in Portuguese soil, you'd 'a' been a murderer—not a policeman executing his duty. That's what that river means. Funny, ain't it? Well, let's go an' get skoff. I'm hungry."

He rose to his feet and started to climb up the bank, halting at a wailing cry of "Sergeant!" from the trooper.

"Well?" he questioned.

The trooper was all agog with nervous impatience.

"Sergeant," he said, despairingly, "won't you let me go after him? It isn't right that he should get away like this. And it's all my fault. I'll never be able to live it down. When the other fellows hear about it they'll rag me out of the service."

"They sure will," the sergeant drawled. "But that ain't one, two, three to what's going to happen to me when the C. O. hears that I let a prisoner get away from me. Of course, I can put some of the blame on your shoulders, but that won't do me any good. I was in charge. He was my prisoner, not yours. But you don't see me pining about it, do you? I reckon it's all in a day's work. Hell, the worst they can do is take my stripes away from me. An' that ain't going to cause me any loss of sleep."

Trooper Dixon made an impatient gesture with his hand.

"Yes," he agreed, "but no one will laugh at you. You've got a name; you've done things. And whether you put the blame on my shoulders or not, others will. And another reason why I ought to go after him, he's got my rifle. Let me go after him, alone. I'll bring him back—I swear I will!"

The sergeant looked at him thoughtfully.

"An' I'm damned if I don't think you think you could, youngster. But—" he shook his head—"I can't let you go. Why, look here. In the first place, you don't know the country. Like as not you'd get lost, an' then I'd have to come looking for you. But that ain't the reason why I ain't going to let you go. Don't you understand, youngster, that we ain't got no standing once across that river? If we went over there, like as not we'd cause international trouble. I'm telling you the Portuguese are almighty touchy about us police crossing over into their territory. Better to let a man escape than run the risk of setting two governments against each other. No, you stay here with me. Maybe we can think up some yarn to tell that'll square us with headquarters."

The trooper made one last appeal.

"But, damn it all, Sergeant," he exclaimed. "It's all very well to talk like that, but I have let a murderer go free—and a man who's killed once may kill again."

The sergeant chuckled.

"He sure would, I'm thinking, if you went after him and tried to bring him back . . . Now come on."

He climbed up the bank and returned to the outspan, followed mournfully by the trooper.

IT WAS a good two hours later. The sergeant, sitting with his back against a tree, his helmet tilted low over his eyes, slept peacefully.

The trooper sat on a rock, full in the glare of the sun, and stared miserably over the veld. He had come out to Africa, had joined the police, full of high ambition. By hard work, attention to duty—and just a little influence—he had hoped to gain a commission. He had visualized himself as a dispenser of white man's justice in black man's Africa. But this farcical failure on his first patrol threatened to blight all his aspirations. He would be the laughing stock of the force—and commissions are not given to those who are a joke among the men they would have to command. It was not that alone which bothered him. He was infinitely more concerned by the fact that through his inefficiency a murderer had escaped from justice.

"Damn it!" he said suddenly, jumping to his feet. "I am going after him. Do you hear, Sergeant? I am going after him."

Lazily, the sergeant opened his eyes, pushed back his helmet and grinned sympathetically at the trooper.

"You ain't," he said slowly. "You've been sitting in the sun too long an' it's affected your mental eyesight. You ain't got a clear vision of things. Now you come an' sit down here in the shade by me. Come on, now! That's an order, given by your superior officer."

The trooper hesitated, then, with a shrug of his shoulders, moodily obeyed.

"The trouble with you," said the sergeant, "is that you ain't got a right perspective—yep, I reckon that's the word I mean—on this case. I reckon your pride's hurt some about that feller getting away. But you'll get over that in time. Right now it looks like the biggest thing in your life. Now me, I've knocked around the world a hell of a lot an' I have come to the conclusion that the biggest thing in life never happens to you; not until you die, that is. There ain't nothing bigger than that."

As he spoke he was rolling a cigaret with an exaggerated care. He peered up slyly from under his shaggy eyebrows at the trooper who stared listlessly before him, apparently unheedful of the words.

"You got a big idea of yourself as a policeman," the sergeant continued. "You're thinking of yourself as a little tin god. The way you're acting is as if you was a judge, an' a jury, an' an executioner, if you know what I mean. Now, get this right. A judge, by reason of his office, has got to decide things according to law an' to the evidence as is presented to him. An' the jury brings in its verdict

according to the evidence, an' as the judge directs. An' the executioner, he ain't got no say-so in the matter at all. It don't matter a damn to him about the right or wrong of the verdict. That's nothing in his young life. But a policeman, now—"

The trooper moved restlessly, impatiently.

"Oh, I know," the sergeant continued with a chuckle. "I know I'm windy. I know that's the name you youngsters give me. But you listen to me. I am telling you, youngster, that no wind blows for no purpose. Ain't it the truth? Some winds break up a drought, some blow away the rains . . .

"You listen to me. You are young; you ain't been in this country more than six months. You been through recruit drill an' they send you out to my outstation, an' you are now on your first patrol. An' you think you know it all. Hell, you don't know nothing! You don't know the bush an' you don't know men.

"What do you think a policeman is, anyhow? Just because he takes an oath an' wears a uniform, that don't change him any inside; not to my way of thinking, it don't. Maybe he gets an order to get a man, but whether he gets him or not, an order won't stop him from thinking. He's a man an' he's dealing with men; an' in this country, I'm saying, he's got to deal with them as men. What I mean, you can't pre-judge a man. 'Specially out in Africa, you can't."

He laughed softly.

"It's funny now, ain't it? Just because I am a sergeant, an' you're only a greenhorn trooper, you got to listen to me an' look polite whether you like it or not. An' maybe, before I'm done, you'll like it. I'm saying that what I'm telling you will give you a different slant of things. It'll maybe help you to understand things that you can't see now.

"Hell, you remind me somewhat of what I was at your age, when I first joined the police out here.

"Listen, I'll tell you something . . ."

'COURSE, in a way, I knew more than you do. I'd traveled some. I was nursemaiding cows on my dad's ranch in Texas almost as soon as I could walk. An' why I left there is nobody's business, an' I ain't telling nobody.

I come to Africa an' I roamed up an' down this land, getting knowledge of sorts. It's a hell of a country until you get to know it. It's hell when you *do* know it. But it's got its good points. The air's clean an' there's a lot of it, an' there ain't no crowding.

But never mind that. I want to tell you about Happy.

We called him that because he was such a damned miserable looking object. He came of mixed stock—Back-veld Boer father, an' an English mother. An old-timer who knew her in the old days said she had a reputation that was none too savory. He said she swindled the Boer into marryin' her. She thought he was a rich farmer; an' he thought she was a virtuous heiress. Hell, they was both fooled!

You can figure for yourself that any kid of theirs had none too easy a time. The life of a trek Boer ain't soft under the best circumstances.

His folks was wiped out by niggers—just a local uprising, it was—an' God knows why they didn't kill Happy, too.

Well, he came up north to this country. Walked the whole blamed way. He appeared in Bulawayo one day with hardly a rag to his back. An' dirty! Give you my word, a lot of people thought he was a native. They swore at him 'cause he walked on the pavement.

There was some disturbance when they found he was a white man. An' because a white man's got to be a white man, if you know what I mean, in this country, a deputation waited on him an' scrubbed him clean—we was none too gentle, believe me—an' fitted him out with clothes.

An' then Frame—he ran a chain of Kaffir trading stores—gave him a job. Put him in charge of a small *winkel* about ten miles south of Bulawayo.

An' Happy, I'm sayin', was the right

man for the job. He could talk the vernacular, an' Dutch, an' English. His English was funny, though. But, as I say, the job suited him. He knew niggers; he didn't have to crawl to them, much. An' Beamish was his nearest neighbor. I'll tell you about Beamish later.

'Course, knowing no other way of living, Happy carried on like as if he was back with the lowest kind of trek Boer. An' that ain't much above the level of a Kaffir.

What'd he look like? That ain't easy to answer. He was tall—he'd have been taller if he'd held his head erect an' squared his shoulders. He had the frame, I'm thinking, of his Boer father. His hair was black, an' always needed cutting. You couldn't see the outlines of his face, 'cause they was blurred by a fuzzy beard. But I remember his mouth was kind of slack an' when you saw his eyes—mostly he looked down at the ground when he was talking to awhite man—there was always fear in 'em. An' say, now I think of it, every once in awhile when you was talking to him, 'specially if you raised your voice, he'd raise his right arm and hold it crooked before his face—like as if he was warding off a blow.

A poor specimen he was, believe me.

But he made a good trader. He knew niggers. An', being what he was, he didn't think it was beneath his dignity to bargain with 'em. By an' by Frame wanted to put him in charge of a bigger store in another district; where he'd have a house to live in instead of sleepin' on the store counter as he did.

Happy said he didn't want to go to this other store. He liked being where he was—where there was no one to bother what he looked like.

Frame saw it was no good tryin' to do anything with him, but, bein' a just man, he gave Happy a quarter interest, besides a salary, in that store he was running.

I reckon he expected some thanks, but he didn't get any. I don't reckon Happy understood at the time what it was all about. He never drew any pay as it was. Frame used to bank it all for him. The way he lived, Happy didn't need any money.

IT'S A FUNNY thing about this, now, African Police. As soon as a fellow gets settled in one place and knows his district, and the folks in it, white and black, somebody up at headquarters with a liver, because he does nothing but sit down in an office chair every day, begins thinking that we're having too good a time or something. An' he plays with us just as if we were men on a chess board.

Well, why this shifting is done don't matter, right now. I know I was all ready to chuck in my hand an' quit the police when they transferred me. I had some pretty good friends in an' about Bulawayo, you understand.

There was Jock Chanley, for instance. An' say, if Jock had ever taken up prize-fighting he'd have been top of the tree. I used to say if I ever had to go under an operation, I'd call on Jock Chanley to administer the chloroform. He carried it in both hands. What I mean, he packed a powerful punch.

There was Tom Smith. I reckon he had drunk more different kinds of liquor than any man living. If you had a map of the world hung up on the wall, blindfolded Smith an' got him to walk toward it with his finger sticking out, it'd be a fifty-to-one shot that he'd been an' knew all about the place his finger touched. Yep, an' sampled all the local brands of liquor.

An' there was Beamish. I reckon he was one of the most popular fellows in the district at that time. He managed a big farm for some rich guy in England who liked to talk about his Rhodesian estates. But he never came out to visit them, so Beamish had a free hand. Hell, I'm saying he had a *free* hand!

He was tall, an' handsome. Blue eyes, straight nose, dimpled chin and golden colored hair that curled. He used to spend the best part of an hour every morning trying to brush them curls out. We used to kid him about his good looks. But hell, he used to say that was his misfortune. He was born that way. For the matter of that, I reckon he was born into everything a man could wish for.

He knew how to live, Beamish did. A happy-go-lucky cuss. Sometimes, when there was a mob of us staying at his place over the weekend, we'd ride to Happy's store an' play a lot of practical jokes on the poor dub. We thought we was having a hellish good time. An' if I felt we was goin' too far at times, Beamish'd point out that we done it all for the good of Happy's soul!

Well, they sent me to an out-station up in Mashonaland. Then they made me a corporal an' put me in charge of a post. An' the years rolled by. Three of 'em.

Then they made me a sergeant an' sent me back to Bulawayo.

The town had changed some; grown a lot.

The men folk seemed to have changed like the town. They had grown up too. The process improved some, maybe, but it had wrecked a good many—from a man's point of view.

An' the men I used to count my best friends, death an' such had scattered them to hell an' gone. Chanley, he had died of malaria. Funny to think of a mosquito knocking *him* out. Smith developed a craze for Kaffir beer—he died of the D. T's. An'—

But hell! You don't have to come to Africa to find out that Death's always on duty.

One day—I hadn't been in the *dorp* more than three or four days—I saw a Cape cart goin' down the street an' walking behind it, head bent, scuffling his tattered boots in the dust, was Happy.

Say, I was so damn relieved at seeing somebody who hadn't changed that I ran after him. An' I gave him a whack in the middle of his back—a bit broader it was than it used to be—an' said—

"Howdy, Happy!"

He jumped like he'd been shot; for a moment I thought he was goin' to run. Then he turned slowly to face me; his eyes met mine for a moment an' then he hung his head, like he always done, an' he said:

"Oh, it's the Yank. And he's a sergeant, now." An' he added, kind of bitter-like, "You will come out to my store like you used to do and play your funny tricks?"

I said:

"Sure I'll come out to your store, Happy. But not to play tricks. I've grown up some."

He looked at me in that funny way he had. An' he said, slowly—

"I'd be glad to see you, Sergeant."

An' then up went his right arm, crooked, an' he ducked his head down behind it, just the same as he always had done. Next thing I knew he'd turned round an' was running down the street after the Cape cart.

I remember feeling like a damn fool standing out in the middle of the road staring after a scarecrow like Happy. An' I went across the street to the Maxim Bar. In a hell of a hurry I was, give you my word. I barged my way through the door an' ran slap into a fellow who was coming out. We met with some force, believe me, an' there were curses on both sides. The way I felt, there was the makings of a fight right there. An' then we both grinned.

"How do, Yank," he said. An'—

"How do, Beamish," said I.

Then we drew back a bit an' looked at each other as men will when they haven't seen each other for a long time. An' he says—

"You're thicker than you used to be, Yank, and taller, but I don't think you've changed."

"You haven't either, Beamish," I said.

But he had. Sort of hard to put your finger on it, though. What I mean, he was as handsome as ever an' looked fit to fight for his life. Leastways he looked that way if you didn't look at him too close. When you did you saw that he had run a bit to puffiness. Bags under his eyes. An' I couldn't remember that his mouth used to turn down at the corners as it did now.

I said, catching him by the arm—

"Come on, we'll have a drink to celebrate."

He shook his head.

"Can't do it, Yank. I've got an ap-

pointment with the lady who is going to be my wife. See you at the ranch some day."

The next thing I knew he had rushed off. Say, for the second time that day I stared like a dumb fool down the street, wondering an' thinking things. Then I remembered I got a thirst to satisfy. So I went into the bar an' drank two or three off quick. Somehow I felt as if I'd got something else to drown beside a thirst.

I SAW them two fellers again, sooner than I expected. It was this way.

I was up at the orderly room next morning talking a few details over with the troop sergeant-major, when a native runner came in with a letter from the manager of the Star Mine. They was having trouble of a sort out at the mine with the native laborers. The niggers was being insolent.

Well, as it happened, there weren't any duty men in camp. And the sergeant-major, he says to me:

"You'd better ride out there, Yank. You know the district, don't you?"

I thought I did, I told him.

"But where is this Star Mine?" I asked.

"I'd forgotten you'd been away quite a bit from the troop," he said. "We've growed up a bit since you were here. The Star's a mile or so beyond Happy's store."

I nodded.

"I saw Happy yesterday an' I told him I'd be out to see him pretty soon. I'll call there on my way. He'll be pleased to see me."

"Maybe," the T. S. M. said. "But don't go playing any tricks on him. He's not as soft as he used to be."

"He's no cleaner," I said.

"No, that's true," the T. S. M. agreed. An' I said:

"While I'm out that way I suppose there's no harm if I go on a bit further an' see Beamish?" You see, I reckoned on staying overnight at Beamish's place.

"That'll be all right," the T. S. M. said.

"Who is this girl he's marrying?" I asked. An' the T. S. M. said—Hell! I stared at him. He said it just like as if he were one of these, now, poets:

"She's one of the sweetest girls that you'll find in the country, Yank," he said. "She's as near to being an angel as a mortal woman can be. Pretty? Pretty isn't the word for it. It's more than prettiness. And she shoots straight, Yank. Absolutely straight."

"Who is she? Where does she hang out?" I asked.

"Her name," the T. S. M. said slowly, "is Betty Leach. She lives with her uncle and aunt. They're homesteading out that way."

Well, we talked a piece more about this an' that; then I saddled up an' rode out to the Star Mine.

I got to Happy's store about noon. Happy wasn't there, but there were a couple of niggers in charge. Smart lads they were, too. Been properly trained. I had a look round the place. Hell! It surprised me quite a bit. He'd made a big thing of it. Anybody with half an eye could see that it was damn prosperous. I have seen stores in big *dorps* that weren't as well arranged as Happy's. But you couldn't say the same for his living hut!

I rode on to the Star Mine and settled what trouble there was.

Believe me, I had to do some tall talking to the manager an' a few of the miners. What I mean, I read the riot act to them. They were surprised some, believe me. They thought I was going to *sjambok* the niggers they'd complained of being insolent. Instead of which I near as not *sjamboked* them! We cleared things up finally an' came to a better understanding. Just the same they weren't over friendly toward me. Didn't even ask me to have a drink. So I rode away.

I don't know why I did it but I found myself riding back to Happy's store. I got there just as he was about to sit down to skoff. Say, an' the next thing I know I was sitting down an' having skoff with him. It seemed there was no getting out of it an' I was hungry, damned hungry.

Riding out on the veld always makes me that way.

After skoff we adjourned to the store an' his nigger boy brought some coffee. An' that was good. An' we smoked cigars. Happy's taste in smokes would have done any man credit. I began to feel a bit better.

Well, me an' Happy sat there talking, lazy-like. An' say, I found Happy an interesting cuss. He talked about the life he'd led with them back bush Boers he'd been brought up with. He talked of death, an' the peril of death, as matter-of-factly as a lot of men I know talk of blowing out the light before they get into bed.

HE KNEW the veld, Happy did, an' niggers an' big game. I learned a lot from him during that talk we had. He gave me the answer to a good many problems about the veld which had always been a mystery to me. The whys and wherefores of things which make this land, at times, the hell it is.

Yep! I got so plumb interested that I forgot all about the sun moving on. An' I suddenly remembered I'd promised myself a good time out at Beamish's ranch. So I got to my feet an' stretched. I reckon I must have remembered, too, at that moment, what sort of a man Happy was on the surface of things. I reckon contempt must have come into my eyes, because Happy sort of cringed an' a whine came into his voice; an' instead of being a fellow who'd been through things he looked to be nothing more or less than a dirty white Kaffir sort of a storekeeper.

I'm saying I became conscious all of a sudden of his rags an' his frowzy looking hair. He seemed self-conscious, apologetic even, because we'd been talking together as equals.

But he didn't want to let me go. I reckon I was the first man—the first white man, that is—that he'd talked to in a dog's age.

"Won't you stay the night, Sergeant?" he said. "I have an extra bed an'—"

But I shook my head. I knew it'd be the part of a Christian to stop an' talk to him a bit longer, but I wasn't Christian enough to sleep in any sort of a bed Happy could offer me.

"No," I says. "I'm going to see Beamish. Plan to stay there the night."

His eyes clouded.

"Mr. Beamish," he said slowly, "is a very funny man. He is always full of jokes, but I can not laugh at them. He says I have no sense of humor. The last time he came to my store he played one of his jokes on me—but I could not laugh."

"No," I said, "you haven't got much of a sense of humor, Happy. What was this joke he played on you?"

Happy frowned.

"There is a man near here," he said, "who has a pet baboon. It is an evil beast. It hates dogs. An' Mr. Beamish, he tied my little dog by a rope to that baboon's collar. He thought it was funny to see them fight. But I could not laugh."

"No," I said, kind of thoughtfully, when Happy had finished. "No, you couldn't laugh at that. Well, I wouldn't worry about it, if I were you. I don't reckon it's your sense of humor that's to blame, Happy, in this case."

He looked sort of puzzled at that an' I didn't think it worthwhile explaining. An' he says—

"Do you mind if I ride along with you a little way, Sergeant?"

"Come along if you want to," I told him.

We saddled up an' got on the way. Happy, he rode a big, rawboned brute of a horse. An' I discovered then for the first time that Happy could ride. Hell, he sat in the saddle like as if he had been born there.

Well, we jogged along an' —don't know how it happened—but after a bit I found myself riding a hundred yards or so ahead of Happy. An' I got to thinking to myself that's how things should be. I'm saying I thought of him as an inferior, if you get my meaning. I reckoned it was right for him to ride behind at a respectful distance.

It was a hot day. My horse was well

broke to the veld. Put him on a trail an' he'd follow all its twistings and turnings without any need of a guiding rein. An' there was nothing to worry about thereabouts. What I mean, no wild beasts or anything like that.

I reckon I drowsed off to sleep.

A thud of galloping hoofs woke me. I opened my eyes an' saw a man riding hell for leather across the veld, heading in a direction which would take him clear in front of me. I pulled up, wondering what the hell it was all about.

An' then another rider came out of the bush patch. A slim figure on a chestnut mare, riding at a fast canter after the first one. As they came nearer I saw the first one was Beamish an' his horse was bolting. No doubt about it.

I watched an' laughed. Beamish, now, he could ride. I reckoned there was nothing to worry about. God knows there was plenty of room on the veld, I thought, for a horse to bolt if he wanted to. I figured he'd be a damn tired and sorry horse before Beamish was finished with him.

Then Happy rode up level with me. An' he says excitedly:

"By God! His horse has run away. We must stop him!"

I laughed. I thought Happy was showing a yellow streak.

Beamish rode by in front of me—damn close, give you my word—an' I wondered at the set look on his face as he pulled at the reins an' cursed an' shouted. I yelled to him, laughing all the time:

"Give him his head, Beamish! Ride him cowboy!"

But he didn't answer me. He was just sitting back in the saddle an' tugging at the reins in a crazy sort of a way. Happy shouted in my ear:

"We've got to stop him, I tell you. We've got to stop him."

I thought it was damn funny. I most near fell from my saddle, laughing, when Happy spurred his horse an' rode fast after Beamish. I was still laughing when the other rider rode up to me.

"Did you ever see two such damn idiots?" I said, my eyes still fixed on Beamish an' Happy. I nearly dropped from the saddle when a woman's voice replied:

"It's not funny, Sergeant. Frank 'll be killed."

I turned an' looked at her then. Her voice made you look at her. She was all the sergeant-major said—an' then some. An' I said, saluting her most polite-like:

"I reckon you're Miss Leach, ma'am. I've heard about you. But there's nothing to worry about. Beamish, he can sit a horse most near as well as me. An' he's got plenty of room hereabouts to ride the devil out of that horse of his. What made him bolt?"

"A bee stung him I think," the girl replied. "But never mind about that. Frank hasn't the room you think he has. There's a row of old mine shafts over there. He's heading directly for them."

"Lord!" I exclaimed. "That makes things different. I didn't know about them."

An' I rode hard after them other two, the girl following.

I GAINED ground right off because I was cutting across the inside of the course they was taking. Behind me was the girl. Above, a cloudless sky. Hell, looking at it that way you might have thought we were four mad fools, going for a morning canter.

But once I looked back at the girl an' saw her face was white an' strained. That put a different light on things, believe me. I shouted something to her what I meant to be comforting, but I reckon she didn't hear me. Her lips moved, I could see that. I reckon she was praying.

But me, I couldn't feel over worried about it. I've already said Beamish was a damn good horseman. I couldn't see there was any danger. All he had to do was, if he couldn't pull the horse up, just slide off its back an' let the animal go to its own end. The worst I figured could happen to Beamish would be a bad shaking up. Maybe a busted rib or two if he

were clumsy. But that was all. Nothing to get weepy about.

Then I got to wondering at the look I'd seen on Beamish's face as he had passed me. An' somehow it came to me then that Beamish wouldn't jump, because he couldn't. I reckoned he'd lost his nerve. I didn't hold that against him, either. That might happen to any man. It's a thing you can't always control. There are times when fear an' a sense of helplessness, maybe, just grips hold of a man an' all he can do is sit still an' let Fate ride him.

I reckon that's what Beamish was doing. An' because of that, I reckoned it was a pity that he could ride so damn well. You see he rode automatically. It was second nature to him to sit a horse. If he'd been a rotten rider he'd have fallen off long ago an' there'd have been no trouble. But he sat there, I'm saying, because he couldn't do anything else.

An' say, when that thought came to me I began to ride a damn sight harder. What I mean, I sat down in the saddle an' got that extra bit of speed out of my mount which any horse 'll give you when you get down to really riding.

I could hear Happy shouting to Beamish to jump.

An' Beamish sat bolt upright in the saddle, his back stiff, just like he was a trooper on parade. I'm thinking his eyes were fixed straight ahead of him, seeing nothing.

Happy was riding neck an' neck with Beamish. I saw him reach out an' put an arm round Beamish's waist an' I knew he was trying to lift Beamish off his horse.

But Beamish, he must have been crazed, swung at Happy with his fist, an' I heard him scream:

"Leave me alone, you damn fool. Leave me alone."

I don't know whether that blow landed or not. I reckon it did, because Happy sort of reeled in his saddle an' his horse slowed up just a bit an' he fell behind. Then Happy spurred it again an' drew level once more. An' this time he reached down an' caught hold of the bridle rein of Beamish's horse, right close to the bit, an' pulled on it. An' Happy was almighty strong. He pulled Beamish's horse's head down lower an' to the side, leaning way out of his saddle as he did it.

I saw that Happy was beginning to get that horse under control, an' I slackened speed some with a sigh of relief.

An' then I gasped, for Beamish was lashing out at Happy with a *sjambok* with all his strength, shouting—

"Let go, you damn fool, let go!"

An' then Happy leaped out of his saddle an' gripped hold of Beamish's horse with both hands round the head; like a cowboy bulldogging a steer, he did it. An' Beamish's horse went down in a cloud of dust.

As me an' the girl rode up, Beamish's horse got to its feet an' stood there trembling, black with sweat. Beamish got up out of the dust an' brushed himself, grinning like as if he'd done something to be proud of.

But Happy, he didn't move an' I jumped off my horse and went to him. His eyes were closed an' his face was bleeding.

I got to my feet, looking round to see if there was anything about there which we could make a stretcher out of, just in time to see the girl an' Beamish come out of a clinch—one of them love embraces. The girl was sobbing sort of hysterical an' Beamish, he was grinning kinda foolishly. It occurred to me then he'd been drinking, an' I heard him say:

"There was nothing to worry about, Betty. I had the brute under control all the time. If it hadn't been for that damn fool of a storekeeper I wouldn't even have had this spill."

SAY, I was all set to say something damned hot to Beamish, but what was the use? I reckoned at the time he believed what he said. I'm saying at the time of stress like that a man loses his sense of proportion an' judgment.

But I wasn't going to let him get away with it. You see, there was Happy lying stretched out full length on the veld, an' the soles of his feet weren't more than

four foot from the edge of a damn big shaft hole. So I says to Beamish—

"You owe your life to Happy, Beamish."

He laughed an' shrugged his shoulders. An' the girl looked at him, sort of thoughtfully; then, with a little cry of pity, she ran to Happy.

She went all white when she saw how near the pit Happy was lying. She didn't give it more than a second's thought, though, but knelt down beside him an' started doing for him the things I'd have done had I had any sense. What I mean, she loosened his shirt collar, an' gave him expert first aid.

When she'd done all she could she got up an' said briskly—

"We must get him to the homestead as soon as possible."

"Which homestead, Miss Leach?" I asked.

She stared at me as if I was a freak out of a museum.

"Why, to our place, of course," she answered.

"You can't take him to your home, Betty," Beamish said. "Don't you understand he's a—" But she wouldn't let him finish.

"I don't care what he is," she exclaimed. "He's going to have the best attention—the best nursing I can give him. Don't you understand, Frank? He saved your life."

The way she said that makes me feel damn lonely an' miserable when I think of it now. She meant that nothing was too good for Happy because he had saved her man's life.

Say, now, it's a funny thing about this Africa. Things'll happen way out on the veld an' there won't look to be a nigger in sight. An' then, first thing you know, the place is a-swarm with them. An' it was like that now. Niggers popped up from everywhere. Formed a sort of ring around us they did, talking excitedly about what had happened. An' they knew. They didn't have to be told. They could read it all in the spoor, just as if it was a story written in a book.

Happy was an old friend of theirs, I gathered, an' they wanted to take him an' care for him at their *kraal*, which, they said, wasn't so far away.

Beamish was all for letting them have their own way.

"That's where he belongs, Betty," he told the girl.

But she wouldn't listen to him an' pretty soon, after we had fixed up some kind of stretcher, we headed for the Leach homestead. Four niggers carried Happy, the others running along beside, ready to take over the burden when the first four tired.

We had a relay of carriers, I'm saying, an' we covered that distance from the shaft to the Leach homestead—a matter of five miles it was—as fast as our horses could trot.

Well, we got Happy to the Leach's place all right. An' Betty Leach's uncle an' aunt, they were good sorts. It didn't seem anything out of the ordinary to them that their niece should bring home a man like Happy to be cared for. They took him in, I'm saying, like as if he was their own son, an' put him in a guest hut. An' believe me, that was a guest hut! Say, I walked about that room on my toes, an' kept my hands in my pockets most of the time for fear lest, if I put my paws anywhere, I'd leave a dirty mark.

The two women folk took hold an' there was nothing else for us men to do, so we went outside an' had a drink or two an' talked about the weather, an' the crops, an' the way the natives were behaving.

Then Leach wanted to know how it happened. An' Beamish told him. Told him the truth, I mean. I reckon he'd come to his senses some. He ended his story with:

"I've played some dirty tricks on Happy in my time, and I thought I was being funny. But that's all past. I really owe my life to him."

An' once again Beamish was standing ace high in my estimation. Say, I reckoned he saw where he was wrong an' was man enough to make amends.

Then Mrs. Leach came out an' said I was to ride into Bulawayo an' send a doctor out as fast as he could come. She reckoned that Happy was hurt internally. Got a concussion, anyway. The sooner the doctor saw him, she thought, the better. So I didn't waste any time in the order of my going. I just mounted an' rode like hell for Bulawayo.

THE VERY next day after that affair I was transferred to an out-station, me sergeant in charge. An' I was there some time before word came to me again about Happy an' Beamish. Happy pulled round in next to no time. He'd got the constitution of a horse.

I heard he was sort of dumb when he rode away from the Leach's. Tried to thank them, but didn't know how.

When he got back to his store he got to work doing things an' it seemed, according to reports, that he was a changed man. Used to shave frequent an' have a bath once in awhile; an' wore clean ducks an' a collar an' tie.

An' he struck it lucky about that time. An old prospector he had grubstaked located a claim. Nothing to get excited about, but enough at least to keep the old-timer who found it in comfort for the rest of his life. An' Happy's share, they say he used that an' the money Frame had been saving up for him to open a store of his own.

An' first thing folks knew Happy had a chain of 'em up an' down the country.

Now I don't want you to run away with the idea that Happy changed all in the twinkling of an eye, as it were, from a dirty, grubby, cringing sort of a man he was, to one of these, now, Greek gods, afraid of nothing. Nothing like that. He was still, as I understood it, a bit cringing-like when he had dealings with other white men. An' he wasn't so almighty clean!

Word came to me, too, of Beamish. Naturally I made inquiries about him. He was a friend of mine. He'd married Betty Leach an' they was living together at the ranch Beamish was running, entertaining all an' sundry. Judging from the reports, they kept a sort of perpetual open house.

Happy received an invite to their wedding, but he didn't go, not even though Beamish rode over an' tried to persuade him.

"I'd like to give you a present," Happy said. "What would you like?"

He meant for Beamish to choose something from his trade stuff. An' Beamish looked round at it an' laughed.

"You got nothing here," he said, "have you? But I'm mighty short of cash right now. If you had a couple of hundred pounds lying around, now, I might take that."

He said that with a laugh, mind you.

An' Happy said, quietly—

"Sure, you can have that."

An' he wrote out a check for Beamish there an' then. An' Beamish took it.

Well, I heard a lot about them three one way and another. Rumors—an' then more rumors.

It seems the fellow in England who owned the ranch Beamish ran came out on a surprise visit, an' he wanted an accounting. An' he wasn't pleased with the one he got. By all accounts Beamish had been milking the place dry. What I mean, he'd been selling cattle an' stock an' forgetting to enter it up. Get me right on this. No one ever suggested that Beamish was a thief. Nothing like that. Just that he was plumb careless with his bookkeeping.

Well, Betty's uncle an' Happy came to his rescue. They advanced him enough money between 'em to square off the debt Beamish owed. But they couldn't keep the job for him; he lost that. An' he an' Betty stayed for awhile at the old folks' homestead. Beamish working on the farm just as if he was a paid hand.

Pretty soon after that Mrs. Leach, she died, an' old man Leach followed her pretty soon. Fever took 'em both. An' then Beamish an' Betty discovered that there was no money left. Old man Leach had mortgaged the homestead to get

Beamish out of that first trouble he had. An' when he died the homestead was sold.

Now maybe you've gathered Beamish had always been pretty damn popular. An' so was Betty. An' naturally, that being the case, there were plenty in the country who were ready to offer them two a helping hand—and this despite the fact that reports were getting around that Beamish was beginning to drink too much, and he wasn't treating Betty exactly right.

It was Happy who came to their rescue finally. He offered Beamish a job managing a store down Plumtree way. An' he was mighty generous in the conditions he offered him. He'd either pay him a wage or allow Beamish enough for living expenses an', besides, a half share of the profits.

An' Beamish, I reckon Betty had put him to shame some at the time, he says to Happy—I got this from one of Happy's assistants who overheard the conversation:

"Well, you saved my life, Happy, an' I suppose I'll be spending the rest of my life working out my debt to you."

An' Happy, he said:

"I didn't ask you to talk about that, but now you've brought it up I want to tell you one thing. You can't pay me back with money or work."

Beamish seemed to see the meaning under Happy's words.

"How in hell do you expect me to pay you back."

An' Happy said, quietly—

"By treating Mrs. Leach as she ought to be treated."

Beamish laughed. An' Happy's arm went up an' he ducked his head behind it. An' he hadn't done that for a long time, so this fellow told me.

Beamish said:

"By God, Happy. This is something to make the boys laugh." An' he was laughing so he could hardly talk. "By God, you dirty rat, I believe you're in love with her!"

An' say, Happy wiped the laugh off his face right there. He swung at Beamish, wild as a cat he was. His fist caught Beamish on the side of the jaw an' most near knocked him out. An' then they had a scrap—one hell of a scrap it was from all accounts. Happy was the strongest of the two, but he had no science; none at all. Wild as a hawk he was with his blows, an' he had no idea of defense. It was all over inside five minutes. But it took another fifteen minutes or more before Happy came to. An' first thing he said was—

"The job is still open to you, Mr. Beamish."

An' Beamish said surlily—

"I'll take it."

"On half shares or salary?" asked Happy.

"Salary," said Beamish.

SAY, youngster, this ain't an easy story to tell. I'm aiming to give you the life story of three people. But I'm thinking, no one man can do that. It ain't as if I'm writing one of these, now, novels, which claim to tell you all about their characters from the time they were born to the time they die. That's all right, an' maybe possible, when you're dealing with fiction; but I'm giving you facts, an' I can only say what I know. I can only give you the high lights. You got to fill in the rest for yourself.

About them three . . . For a long time they didn't cross my path of life. The years ambled along, an' I was shifted from one station to another. Leading an up an' down life if you know what I mean. Promotions an' demotions came my way. I took 'em all in my stride. A bit of braid on my arm don't mean a hell of a lot to me.

In due course I was transferred to an out-station in the Usher district, an' the men under me was as new to the district as I was. The man in charge before me had slept on the job, I'm thinking. Leastways, there wasn't any maps about, no patrol reports; nothing that'd put a new fellow wise to the condition of things. An' if the station day book meant any-

thing, the police who'd been there before us spent most of their time riding down to investigate sundry complaints about a store run by one Kaffir Beamish.

Well, being anxious to do a good job at this out-station, I sent my men out on patrol. An' me, I rode out to Kaffir Beamish's place, never thinking for a minute of that other Beamish I used to know. How would I?

It wasn't more than a morning's trek from the police camp, along a dirt track, an' I saw the place a good bit before I got to it. Hell! It stood out like a dirty scar on the clean surface of the veld. A collection of tumbledown huts an' a tin shanty which I reckon was the store. An' there was a cattle *scherm* an' some goats; an' a few scrawny cattle an' niggers lounging around.

When I got near I saw a woman come out of one of the huts. A white woman. I heard her talk to the natives. Believe me, she knew the lingo, an' she knew how to handle them. They moved away from that place right smart. I spurred up an' dismounted. I heard a noise of men fighting inside the hut; quick, panting breathing an' the thud of blows, an' curses. I tried to go into the hut, but the woman, she pulled herself together an' stood in the opening, her arms barring the way for me.

I had a good look at her. She was a thin wisp of a woman. Her face was drawn an' haggard looking. The clothes she wore, they'd been washed an' patched so many times a man couldn't tell what their original shape an' color had been. Her shoes were down at heel. But when you looked at her eyes you forgot all that. They shone clear an' steadfast.

"What's it all about?" I asked.

She said then, in a quiet voice in which there was everything—hope, despair, love an' pity. An' don't put me down as a sentimental, imaginative fool, neither. I'm saying all that was in her voice. Ah, an' more besides.

"My husband," she said, "is receiving treatment at the hands of the best friend he ever had."

An' I said, sort of stupid-like, not knowing what else to say:

"You mean somebody is beating your husband? Who?"

"Happy," she said.

An' as she said it her courage seemed to give out. She slumped to the ground an' hid her face in her hands. I was staggered some, believe me. I lifted her an' sat her on a box nearby. Then I went into the hut.

It was clean, but in one hell of a disorder. The furnishings, what little there was, was of the poorest kind. But, right then, I wasn't particularly interested in that end of it. My interest was in the two men that was there, an' what they was doing. But it was all over when I got there. What I mean, there was one man sprawled on the ground staring up at the roof of the hut, his mouth open, blood streaming from his nose, eyes closed. No, he wasn't dead—nothing like that. I could see that he was breathing, breathing hard. He'd been knocked out, but punished first. I reckon that was the treatment the woman had meant.

An' then I looked at the man who had knocked him out. He stood looking down at the other chap with a sort of contemptuous look in his eyes. The man who was down, his breeches an' shirt were ragged, his hair long an' unkempt, an' I reckon he hadn't shaved in a dog's age. I said to the man who was standing up—

"What's the idea, Happy?"

Hell, if it hadn't been for the fact that the woman had told me, I wouldn't have known him. He was bigger an' broader than ever. He looked confident; sure of himself. He wore a beard, but it was neatly trimmed. His linen was clean.

He looked at me hard.

"I have seen you before, Sergeant," he said.

"You have," I said, an' I told him where. An' we shook hands.

There wasn't any need for any explanations of the years that had passed since I last had seen him. There ain't, I'm thinking, when men meet. They take a hell of a lot for granted. Besides, in this case, the story was plain for anybody to see.

I HAD a collie bitch once an' she had a litter of pups; four of 'em had everything well bred, blooded pups ought to have. But the fifth one—hell, I never did place what breed of dog he was. He was a throwback, if you know what I mean. As big a mongrel as any you'll see in a Kaffir *kraal*. Nature plays them kind of tricks more often than we're apt to realize. "Sports", the scientific guys call 'em. An' I'm ready to think something like that had happened to them two men. Figure it out for yourself. Beamish had had everything—birth and training. An' look at what he'd come to. An' then consider Happy an' what he'd made of himself.

Well, I don't know, but let it go at that.

Happy, he now says, answering my question:

"He's a hopeless case, Sergeant, an' it's maybe that I'm handling him all wrong. But I can't leave him alone—not when I hear that he ill-treats Betty."

An' say, the way he said that told me what Betty meant to him. An' I said:

"Ain't you maybe butting in where you ain't wanted? She's a grown woman, free to leave him if she wants to."

He shook his head.

"It isn't possible to order a woman's life that way, Sergeant. She loves him in spite of everything, an' she can't leave him. She wouldn't be the woman she is if she could."

"If she loves him like you say, how do you account for the fact that she let you manhandle him like this?" I asks.

An he said:

"It's the only way to handle him; she realizes that. A thrashing like this checks him for a bit. But it doesn't do any lasting good. I can see that. But Betty—hope never leaves her. When he comes to he'll cry and ask her to forgive him, and promise better things. And, at the time, he'll mean it. And she'll believe him. But—" Happy shook his head.

"What's he doing here? What are you doing here?" I asks.

"This is one of my stores. I put him in charge; and look at the place. This is the fifth one he's ruined. He's corrupted the niggers. He sells them rotgut gin; their women aren't safe from him. It's been my habit to visit him once a month or so and this isn't the first time I've had to thrash him."

Then the woman came in an' she got down on the floor beside her husband. She put his head in her lap an' stroked his forehead, an' ran her fingers through his hair. An' Happy said, slowly, very sadly:

"Haven't you learned your lesson yet, Betty? Won't you leave him now?"

She looked up at Happy; tears welled out of her eyes an' rolled down her cheeks.

"No," she said, shaking her head. "I can't leave him. He needs me now more than ever."

An' then Beamish opened his eyes an' looked up into hers. An', hell! The misery an' remorse in his voice!

"Betty!" he said. "I'm sorry. I'm—"

She motioned us to leave. Well, there was only one thing for me an' Happy to do, an' we done it. We went outside an' left them two together.

Happy stayed down at my camp for three or four days after that an' we got to know each other real well. An' he told me a lot about himself.

But, come to think of it, it was more what he didn't tell me than what he did, that put me wise to why he'd done what he'd done. I'm saying that it ain't the least of things to be chalked up to Betty Leach's credit, that, because of her, Happy was able to rise up above himself, able to rise, I mean, from the dirt an' the slovenly way in which he had been living, an' would have continued to live if it hadn't been for her. Not that she, I'm saying, was conscious of having done anything. She was never anything toward him but her own natural, straight shooting self.

The day Happy left me he said:

"I'm going to move Beamish out of this district. I'm going to give him another chance. I'm opening a store down Hartley way. I've got a place all built. Got a regular homestead for them. Furnished

it in good style. I've even had a bathroom with running water put in. Maybe he'll be able to pull himself together in a new district and new surroundings."

But even as he said that I saw that he reckoned it was a hopeless case, an' he said:

"I'm afraid. Afraid the time'll come, Sergeant, when I'll have to kill that man!"

WELL, wet seasons go an' wet seasons come. An' me, I had a job to do. I couldn't concern myself with folk who had gone outside my district.

I did a lot of wandering up an' down in the next two or three years, learning things all the time. Leastways I hope I learned 'em. An' so I came at last in charge of this out-station here with more years behind me than I like to think about.

I'm saying I learned a lot, but I forgot a lot, too, about people an' such. An' when a few days back a nigger runner brought me a note signed Betty Beamish, it didn't, believe me or not, set me remembering anything. The note didn't say much an' it had been written, I could see, in a hell of a hurry. It said, "Please send a trooper at once to the store at Three Tree Kops."

Well, all you fellows was out on patrol an' so I set off myself. I sort of wondered what I was going to find, comedy or tragedy. That's one of the things that makes life worth living in this country. You never know. Most nearly always it's the unexpected until you get to looking for the unexpected, then something common an' humdrum turns up in its place.

Well, say, when I got to the store I remembered all the things I ought to have remembered before.

Man, I ain't wasting any time describing things. You got to picture it for yourself. I'll only say it was dirtier than that other place up in the Plumtree district.

There was a weeping an' wailing in the store hut. I went in. There were a lot of Boer women sitting about, weeping. An' there was a couple of their men folk standing sort of helpless, looking on. An' on a tumbledown bed in the corner was the woman, Betty Beamish. She was dead. No need to say any more than that about her.

A hell of a way for a white woman to go out. It hits me kind of hard when I think about it. A man don't expect to see a slummy sort of death out here, where there's all this room an' all this clean air . . .

No, I ain't saying nothing about how she looked. You're young. You'll maybe come up against that sort of thing some day. When you do, I'm hoping you'll feel as I felt—damn sick, youngster.

I covered her up an' turned round on the Boers.

"Who did it?" I asked. An' they shook their heads. One said—he looked like a picture of Moses:

"We know who did it. But she made a statement before she died. My daughter—she can write a good hand—took down all that the woman who is dead, said. The Vrow Beamish, she swore on the Book that what she said was true. An' she made us swear that we would give her words to the police. And, so that her poor soul could go easily, we swore it. On the Book we swore it."

"An' where is this statement?" I asked.

The old Boer gave it to me. It said:

> Knowing that I am near death and about to go into the presence of my Maker, I, Betty Beamish, swear that I have only myself to blame for the injuries causing my death. I was standing on a chair and fell. There is no blame to be attached to any one. Least of all to my husband.
>
> —BETTY LEACH BEAMISH

I felt above a bit sick. Wasn't that a hell of a note? An' can't you take your hat off to that woman? I've heard some folk call that sort of relationship between man an' wife, "slum loyalty." I'm saying there's something mighty noble about it. Something bigger than my mind can comprehend.

But, you see the position I was in. I knew who'd killed her an' so did the

Boers. But what was the good of that against that statement of hers. Knowing ain't evidence, as you'll quickly learn if you take a case before a magistrate without being able to prove what you know. An' neither me nor the Boers could prove anything.

The wounds she died of could have been made the way she said they were if you stretched a point. An' it wasn't none of my official business to inquire about the other bruises she'd got on her body. They were several days old, I reckon. An' I couldn't, either, destroy that statement. That was in my mind. But the old Boer warned me not to. He was one of these orthodox, back veld Boers. He believed the world was flat an' he was as ignorant as hell. But he'd given his word to the woman. He'd sworn on the Bible. An' nothing'd make him go back on that.

"Almighty, man," he said to me. "The vengeance of the Lord is slow. But sure—terribly sure. Beamish's punishment will come."

But me, I'm an impatient cuss at times. I reckoned on giving Beamish a bit to go on. An' if an accident happened to him, like it did to his wife, I wasn't going to grieve none. Accidents will happen.

"Where is Beamish?" I asked. The old Boer knew, I reckon, what was in my mind.

"We will show you," he said.

An' he an' the other Boer took me over to another hut built apart from the rest. It had a thorn *scherm* round it. A nigger wench ran out as we entered. The old Boer swore at her. In good Biblical language, if you know what I mean.

AN' BEAMISH! He was bloated, sodden, with dirty yellow skin. I'm saying he didn't have any human intelligence left in him. Man! What the years had done to him! He'd descended, if you know what I mean. His body an' his mind had come down to that yellow streak level which, I reckon, had been born in him. He was sitting on the ground, leaning against the wall of his hut, sunning himself. The place stunk of Kaffir beer.

He tried to get up when we entered, but his legs wouldn't support him. His head wobbled like as if his neck had no stiffness in it. He grinned up at me, but I don't think he saw me or knew what he'd done or anything.

It was plain enough to see that it wasn't any good talking to him. Wasn't any good letting into him with fists or words. Hell, there was no more resistance to him than there is to a lump of dough.

Say, I suddenly heard myself cursing him an' I was straining forward. Then there was the sound of booted feet outside an' I knew, before I saw, who it was. Yes, it was Happy. An' I'm saying his face was like the wrath of God.

He didn't see me or the Boers. He brushed past us, not hurrying. He picked up Beamish. Held him up by the scruff of his neck an' stood him on his feet, propping him against the wall of the hut. God knows what it was that stirred Beamish's memory right then, but he laughed at Happy.

"Hello, Happy," he said, foolish-like. "Come to see your old sweetheart?" An' then he went on, seeming to talk to the world in general, "This fellow Happy saved my life once," he said. "An' he wants my wife in payment. But he damn well won't get her. Ha-ha!"

I saw Happy's back stiffen, but he didn't say anything. Reckon he saw what I seen—that Beamish wasn't in a state to talk serious. Didn't know what he was saying, anyway. But he kept on talking. God! How he talked. A lot of it was dirty; no sense repeating it. It came, anyway, from a mind that was diseased.

He bragged about how he'd treated Betty. He lied about her.

Say, Happy's back was toward me an' it was broad. Hell! Why tell you that? But I knew what was happening. I knew by the sudden hunch up of his shoulders.

Beamish's voice stopped in the middle of a sentence. Stopped as quick as a

water flow stops when you turn off the tap. He didn't make no more sound except a gurgle like dirty water makes when it rushes down the waste pipe. The two Boers—they're at the side of me an' they can see what I can't—gasp.

"Almighty!" says one.

An' the other—

"He's killing him!"

But neither me nor them tried to stop it. Wouldn't have been any good, I'm thinking, even if we had tried.

Then Happy turns his head round an' looks square at me. His hands were still round Beamish's throat.

"I ought, Sergeant," he said, "to have done this years ago. I saved his life once. It is mine to take."

An' he gave Beamish a shake an' let go of him. But Beamish dropped in a heap to the ground an' didn't move. Me an' the Boers didn't go near him. We saw there was nothing we could do.

Happy turned right round then an' held his hands out, not saying a word to none of us. We held that pose for some considerable time. Leastways it seemed a considerable time.

Then the old Boer said:

"*Ach sis!* Here is nothing but evil. Before our eyes murder is done. Sergeant," he said to me, "it is written in the Good Book that those who take the sword must perish by it."

"It also says," I answered, "an eye for an eye, life for a life."

The old fellow glowered at me.

"There's a life still due to the law," he says. "An you're a policeman."

I saw what he meant. An', hell, I had to do it. There was no other way. I unhooked my handcuffs from my belt an' I snapped 'em on Happy's wrists.

"I arrest you for murder," I said . . .

THE SERGEANT rolled and lighted another cigaret. Trooper Dixon looked at him incredulously, and exclaimed:

"My God! How could you, Sergeant?"

The sergeant blew out a cloud of smoke.

"What else could I do, youngster? Take the facts. Happy was a murderer. He'd killed a man right there before my eyes."

"But think of the provocation!" Dixon shouted excitedly. "Think of all that had happened! Good lord, Sergeant, killing was too good for him!"

"So you say, youngster. But a policeman ain't allowed to pass judgment. He gets his man—an' leaves the rest to them whose duty it is. Think, youngster, of the oath you took."

Dixon shook his head.

"An', anyway," the sergeant continued easily, "I was pretty sure in my mind that the judge'd take all the facts into consideration; an' though he'd be bound, on the evidence, to sentence Happy to be hanged, I reckoned it was a sure thing Happy'd be reprieved an' only have to serve ten or fifteen years."

"That would be worse than being hanged," the trooper said bitterly.

"Well, what would you have done, youngster?" the sergeant asked.

"Me—" the trooper stuttered in his earnestness— "I'd have let him go."

"Not with the Dutchmen looking on, you wouldn't have," the sergeant said phlegmatically.

"Then," said the trooper, "I'd have taken him away a prisoner. But as soon as we'd got well out of sight of witnesses I'd have let him go."

The sergeant smiled.

"As I recollect," he said slowly, "me and my prisoner was riding along most companionable, an' he wasn't handcuffed, when we run most unexpected-like, upon you. Lost in the bush, weren't you?"

"Yes," Trooper Dixon admitted. "But I don't see—"

"You complicated things, youngster," the sergeant said, "coming across us like that. Hell, don't you see? I didn't know you. You'd only just come to my outstation. An', youngster, you was full of big ideas of what a policeman ought to be an' do. An' so— Well, the rest is plain enough, ain't it? I had to take you along with us. An' Happy—he had to escape from *you!*"

Gitchee Gumee

By

HELEN VON KOLNITZ HYER

TRUST not Superior, the shining Big Sea Water;
The Indian's "Gitchee Gumee" is an evil Manitou,
Wreaking her vengeance on daring men who've fought her
From golden Minnesota to the great locks at the Soo.
Gayly they brave her, the hulking iron steamers,
Stone from Rogers City for the mines at Calumet;
Steel from Duluth; and red copper ingots
Smelted out at Houghton; lumber from Marquette.
Fogs are her blankets; winds are her arrows;
Choppy seas her war clubs, pounding cruelly;
Pounding the rivets of the armor plated steamers,
The thirty-two-hatched freighters that bear the grain to sea.
Proud are the men who man the Great Lakes steamers,
Keen eyed and wind wise, fearless and free;
Vikings of commerce, giant blue eyed dreamers,
Hardened to the perils of the inland sea.
Reckless of reefs and rocky buttressed islands,
Crammed to the gunwales with golden Western wheat,
Wind scourged and ice sheathed they run the raging narrows
That England and Europe and half the world may eat.
Deep in her lodge beneath her icy water,
Evil Lake Superior, scowling as they pass.
Brews her wicked potions for the gallant men who've fought her,
Hides her wicked potions with a surface smooth as glass.
But always the sailors, the hardy, lake wise sailors,
Sing as they wait the foghorn's warning moans:
"Trust not Superior, hiding her deviltry—
The floor of Gitchee Gumee is white with dead men's bones!"

RAYMOND S. SPEARS

tells a story of the tidewater swamps

SALT GRASS DEPUTIZING

A LONG LEGGED cowboy wearing a wide, wet hat and dripping clothes rode into Bayou Crossing whistling merrily. When he swung down from his mule and gave his stained chaps a hitch, the leather wings sagged limply and water ran down them. The toes sticking out of the chaps were rubber, for Alligator Joe wore hip boots. He had wrapped his spur bands with squirrel skin, too, so they would not chafe his footgear.

Rain was pouring down, though this was the dry season after the winter rains. Mud was falling from the belly of his tall black mule and the clots were running down the beast's thin legs in blue-gray streamlets. Dejectedly, the mule switched a long ratty tail and rolled his eyes and ears in disgust. As his master passed by, the mule gave a tentative lift of his right forefoot and the suck in the mud betrayed him, so that Alligator Joe jumped and landed with his face toward the mule, cussing.

"Yo'—yo' danged old scoundrel!" the cowboy exclaimed. "T'll dress yo' down, boy, yas indeedy! Ho-law! Yo' eveh kick—much—an' I'll have a pair of mule-skin chaps, yas, seh!"

The mule sighed, sagged dejectedly,

lopped his ears, and Alligator Joe walked sidewise up the low wooden steps of the Bayou Crossing commissary. The storekeeper was a tall man with a long goatee, and water stains down over his shoulders. He was steaming out beside the potbelly stove, twisting his shoulders comfortably.

"Howdy, Joe!"

"Mornin', Cap'n; how's tricks?"

"Kinda tol'ble," Captain Riger replied. "That makes me think; Sher'f Harbey jes' telephoned down 'f any yo' fellers seen a coupla bad lookin' *hombres* goin' through, actin' suspicious, to pick 'em up."

"Yeh? What happened?"

"Bruck off'n the chain gang."

"Dawggone! If them damned politicians didn't use sech rusty old leg irons them fellers couldn't break away so."

"Said puticklar'f Alligator Joe come along to give him a .30-30 carbine, on the county, take a receipt an' tell 'im he's dep'tized."

"My Lawd! I cain't waste no time huntin' them fellers."

"Said yo'd work a week er take the consequences!" the man who kept the commissary emporium remarked, grinning.

"Ef that scoundrel was younger I'd be blamed s'picious he was co'tin' the same girl as me," Alligator Joe declared with great disgust. "Heah I's jes' in to git a box of candy in a waterproofed wrappin', an' I runned right into this yeah—"

"Yo' save a dollar on that candy," the commissary man said, practically, "an' git nine dollars on the county."

"Yeh, an' spos'n I lose that carbine off'n the county? I gotter affidavy hit's an accident."

"An' if yo cotch 'm yo' gits fifty each, too," the storekeeper remarked.

"Ef I was old an' a worn out rooster, same's yo', likely I'd be thinkin' business an' po'try'd be done gone off'n my conscience."

"Boy, yo' don't know me," the captain said, and brought out the carbine.

He carefully unwrapped it from its oily rags and pulled the cork from the muzzle. Then he ran a rag through the barrel and squinted through it, remarking:

"Don' yo' let that inside git rusty, an' yo' keep't wiped off, outside, an' the works, too. Heah, sign heah."

Alligator signed the receipt, which was also acknowledgment of his appointment as deputy sheriff, special and for one week. He stood by the stove two or three minutes.

One of the men who had escaped was a tall, thin fellow who had been caught skinning cows that had died in a Norther, which roused the manager of the BKG outfit, the hides being the only salvage from those casualties; this fugitive was Shuffling Pete Havey. The other fugitive was Mop Akeyes, who was bad, having been sent up for disorderly conduct, shooting a man in the Bluebird Oil Field.

"Reckon them fellers got any guns?" Joe asked.

"Oh, yeh!" cheerfully. "Busted one of the guards on the head an' took a repeatin' buckshot gun. Then they snuck into the office an' jes' loaded down with ammunition, rifles, short guns, one thing an' another."

"Oh, dawggone!" Joe sighed. "Ef I lose a .30-30 I git docked twenty-seven dollahs an' fifty cents. An' all them fellers does is jes' hand out fiaharms an' whole back loads o' shoots! When was it?"

"Las' night—"

"Horses?"

"Nothin' off'n the sher'f." The informant shook his head. "They s'picioned they took two saddles an' harness—"

"I don't blame 'em," Joe growled. "'Fore I'd ride one o' them spavined, soft footed, lump jawed, wormy hosses that sher'f department has, I'll tell yo', I'd stay in jail, I would. Well, s'long."

"S'long, Joe! Look out fo' that Mop Akeyes." The storekeeper shook his head." He c'n shoot right 'r left, dangerous."

"How 'bout Shufflin' Pete? He c'n kill cat squirrels runnin'!"

"Yeh, course, but this Mop Akeyes, he's good."

"My Gawd!" The cowboy rolled a

cigaret and looked around for a dry place to scratch a match, finally wiping his rifle hammer and nicking it there, puffed rapidly, then added, "Who else is dep'tized, 'sides me?"

"Nobody; sher'f's budget's low. 'Sides, he said't yo'd be all right."

"His economy ain't no compliment," the cowboy grunted, and soused on his way through the rain, smoking.

"Damn yo', Juke!" he grunted. "Yo' git yo' come-uppance, now!"

The cowboy rode slogging down the oyster shell middle of the road to a lunch room and walked in. He told the buxom girl there that he was now a county charge, and would she feed him and put up a dry lunch? It was on the county, of course, as he was a poor, benighted, no 'count, dad-forsook deputy sheriff for the present, inclusive for the next week. She grinned and said she had no respect whatever for politicians, public officials and whoever lived on the county from necessity, poverty or by appointment.

"Reckon yo're man hunting?" she remarked.

"Yeh!" he growled. "Afteh huntin' that man-mule of mine, now I got to hunt two scoundrels, name of Mop Akeyes and Shuffling Pete."

"Pete's bad," the girl exclaimed sharply. "Look out, Joe."

"So-so." Alligator Joe shook his head. "The bad one this time's Shuffling Pete's temp'rary companion."

"They'll head into the Salt Grass, won't they?"

"Shufflin' Pete will." Joe sighed. "He's jes' a mud larker, that man. He neveh does walk where hits dry. If Mop's like him, I'd jes' soon try to find a pair otters as them two. An', say, Duckling, this coffee's shore fittin' fo' to grow hair on a man's chest."

"If yo'll promise not to git it shot up, I'll give yo' a hot bottle of hit to tote."

"I'll carry hit behind me an' any bullet goes through hit'll have to go through me fustest."

"If that happens I'll give the sher'f department putickular hell!" Duckling declared with emphasis. "I'd hate to have that bottle bruck."

"Add somethin' on my 'count, too," Joe said emphatically. "Well, I'm glad this is the dry season. Sun'd oughta be out in a day'r two."

Alligator Joe took a waterproofed bag of oats for his mule. He assured the beast it was on account of weight, and not for any regard to the mule's taste for dry oats, instead of saturated, musty grain.

TWO MILES out at the end of the shell road Joe turned south to a weathered ranch outfit. The man who kept that outfit was sitting on the balcony, a large, fat fellow with his wide hat over one knee and his long gray hair hanging straight down like his mustache, but his short beard was bristling. Every step the mule took water splashed and black mud flew.

"Mornin', Senator," Alligator Joe greeted. "Kin I go down't the Lower Pasture?"

"No, suh."

"Why not?"

" 'Count of some danged hydrophobies left the gate open las' week, an' I had two hundred head drift oveh on't Chocolate Bayou, where I didn't want 'em."

"But I'm dep'ty sheriff!"

"Don't cyar if yo're Major Keeling, commandin' the Texas Rangers!" the old rancher replied. "That gate's locked. Hit stays locked. Anybody takes the key does hit out of my pants pocket, afteh I'm daid."

"All right, I'll wait."

Alligator Joe swung down and hitched his mule. He came through the gate, shooed a dog off of one of the other large armchairs with splint bottoms, and sat down. He cocked his chair back, stuck his feet on the balcony rail and rolled a cigaret. The old rancher took a smoke too. They sat in morose silence for a time, and then a comely yellow woman announced something to eat. The two went in and sat in a large interior, with here and there some water dripping on the

floor. Part of a young steer was smoking, roasted, on the table with hot bread and browned gravy, one thing and another for fixings and soppings. The two ate with sundry other whites.

After dinner the rancher turned to one of the black riders and told him to go down to the fence and let this danged blasted white eruption on a peaceable landscape into the lower pasture. So Alligator Joe rode down and the black man told him about a new way to short-cut across the wet place which he had happened to find while looking over the cows the other day.

All Joe would have to do was hit, kittering toward the Sulphur Mills smoke, and cross the loose place about a hundred yards from the snake bend which he knew on Fish Bayou, and then go east as far as he could, and then turn up to the Watch Motte. It would save more than two miles of exasperation and misery.

So Joe rode on, feeling good. When he passed the One Oak Motte, he turned sharp, kittering, and kept the Sulphur Mills smoke till he came to the loose place, where he swam his mule through the soft mud and then he hit the loop on Fish Bayou and had no trouble, except that one hip boot took in some water, and he had to take his pants off to wring the leg on account of its being salty, and mean on the hide. Accordingly, he reached Watch Motte, where he had a twelve foot mound with holes cut through the brushy trees on several sides and a piece of Army tarpaulin canvas to shed rain.

There he sat, generally and particularly cussing the discovery by the sheriff department that Alligator Joe was not unwilling to serve as deputy and sure knew the man-runways, as well as the cow-paths, alligator nests, duck swims and all those things in the Salt Grass. Joe did not take four, five men with him. Fact was, no one could follow him if he was in a real hurry and was taking the short cuts through. The penalties of fame and efficiency rested heavily on Alligator Joe.

Sometimes the clouds broke away in patches; sometimes they lowered till streamers dragged across the tops of the reeds; wading birds and swimming birds flew by, and some of them stopped over in a wet place a few yards farther east. From the top of the mound in all directions it looked as though water just fairly surrounded Watch Motte, but appearances were deceptive. In several directions a good mudlarking mule could be driven through; of course, it would get wet and muddy in places.

Juke had his head under the tarpaulin, which shed water off the four quarts of oats Alligator Joe begrudged his mount, with many a fond cussword. And Juke, pretending to be chewing his oats, just missed biting off Alligator Joe's ear, and the cowboy was so caught by surprise he almost forgot to swear and bang the impertinent nose with his fists.

"Shu-u!" Joe sighed. "Some day, Juke, me 'n' yo's going to have a real, genuine, honest quarrel."

All the afternoon Alligator Joe watched the fastnesses of the Salt Grass. Dicky birds came into the branches of the patch of trees which grew on the nubbin mound and, as night fell, it seemed as if layer by layer the gray gloom grew denser and deepened in a silence which was intensified by the dripping of water from the young spring leaves and by the voices of the wildfowl, waders and scaly things which gave low and bellowing sounds at intervals that warm night. Two or three times Joe kicked or shooed away short, wide snakes which crawled around over the mound as though they enjoyed its scratching on their bellies, for a change, after living in the slick of the clays and soups.

Night settled black as villainy itself. Alligator Joe had smoked a last cigaret and, wrapped in his saddle blanket, resting on the crack between two logs off the damp ground, he went to sleep.

"Ain't anybody goin' by in the night," he told himself.

But after he was sound asleep, having slept long enough to get his wet clothes warm on the contacts, and he was feeling good, a bump on the chest awakened him

with a start. He felt around. This was Juke who had crowded under the tarpaulin, not that he minded the wet or was not used to it, but because he knew Joe would talk to him presently. And Joe would have talked instantly, only the wet muzzle of the mule slapped him in the face, square on his own open mouth, nose and chin. He could not talk for a minute, and in that period he heard something.

Far out in the marsh were sounds. Listening, Alligator Joe shook his head. That was not fish jumping, alligators swimming on the surface, ducks flapping their wings, cows uneasy in the night, wandering around. The splash and sog had a particularly different and distinct sound. Alligator listened.

"Lots of fools besides me are in this world," he reflected, as he sat down all wet there on a Salt Grass mound, when he might be somewhere else in a country where the sheriff did not deputize him every five minutes or so, to catch somebody the department had not been able to hang on to— "Dad-boasted, blinked gov'ment 'ficials!"

And now men were coming here, prodding along. They were coming right down through the night in the marsh. Of all the benighted, misbegotten, miserably ignorant and pestering—crossing the Salt Grass down at the edge of the tidewater when it was black as a blind negro in the dark! On horseback? Now, that did not sound like horses, come to think about it. Wasn't mules, either. Stepped right off, all right, the way they splashed and kissed the mud—shu-u-u! Plowing the water with their breasts, coming right along; steady, too! Doggone! Swimming a coupla horned critters, sure 'nough! What were they traveling for at night, anyhow, two of 'em? How come two cows romping along thataway?

Well, Alligator Joe would sure investigate.

The mule, Juke, was wriggly, anxious, and presently backed off uneasily down behind the mound. Alligator Joe listened to the mule's slide-out.

"He knows them are human, half human, the rest pisen cottonmouth moccasins."

The cowboy felt around till he found the carbine, and pulled the cork out of the muzzle and then kept it pointed down, so no water would hit into the bore and spot it all up, contrary to warnings. He felt around to make certain his holsters had not shed their contents, either, while he was sleeping. One six-gun was gone, but he found it in the crack between the two logs. He put it back where it belonged. Good thing he had fair warning, or he might not have had time to hunt for it.

While he prepared, drew buckle straps tighter, wriggled the itch and clamminess out of his clothes, scratched his hair with a currycomb so the tangles would not draw on his scalp and distract his attention, the sounds came nearer—heavy splashing, slogging, sucking. And then Alligator Joe exclaimed under his breath:

"Brahmas—halfbreeds, anyhow! Where them cows goin'?"

His eyes followed the pointing of his ears. Two animals were coming out of the west of north. He could see faintly a quivering glow on the surface of water; but the grass, the tall reed patch, was opaque, black. And then, out yonder, he discerned a shadow against a faint glimmer, followed by another silhouette.

"Humpbacks!" he murmured. "Pretty danged high humps—what th' hell? Shu-u-u! Hyar they come, ridin' Brahmas! Well, I'll be doubly damned!"

He sat astonished. Two fugitive scoundrels, not only coming by night, but riding Brahmas. 'Course, that was like over in among the Cajuns, in Louisiana. Nothing could get through the Louisiana swamps but steers, sometimes hitched to sulkies with two wheels twelve foot high. Alligator had seen one of them one time, and like to have died laughing. The way things are, shell roads for buggies and wagons; them places a horse can go through; then wettish mule going; and finally, after it is so bad nothing can get through except steers, then a man needs

a boat. Alligator Joe reckoned he'd reached the sinking place for mules, and hyar come the steers—Brahmas, tall, narrow, with spread hoofs for walking on thick soup, if necessary. And it was necessary.

And suddenly there was a flare, just as if the night were jumping to one side, leaving a gray pallor, and the cowboy deputy sighed with satisfaction. Dawn was at hand, and those two cow riders were still five minutes or so distant. Nobody but Shuffling Pete would ever think of coming down through those parts at night—and he had been coming all night. Bad, mean, miserable. Alligator Joe gave his stomach a final twist and touched the trigger of his carbine, getting the pull exactly.

A hundred yards, seventy yards, down to fifty—coming straight in.

EVEN saddle Brahmas after plunging and wallowing all night through the Salt Grass over muskrat and otter runways, with now and then a soft alligator crawl, would be blowing weary. But at thirty yards, when the dawn had come out better than early candlelight, suddenly both those Brahmas stopped short. Plague take it! An eddy in the morning zephyr had carried to their nostrils a whiff of fresh mule or man scent.

When the two beasts stopped, both the men in the saddles flopped over and splashed in the soggy reeds. Approaching the Motte, they would naturally be suspicious, alert, ready.

"Damn me as a fool cowboy!" Alligator Joe thought to himself. "If I'd smucked out thataway meetin' 'em, prob'ly I'd got 'em by surprise. 'Course, I hated to git my feet wet. I'm always pertectin' my feet, at the expense of my head."

Two charges of buckshot from a fast working repeater action slapped into the hard timber of the Watch Mound, searching it. Alligator Joe heard with satisfaction that the lead was flying high. Also, he blessed the intelligence and discretion of Juke, who was crouching down behind the mound, in the laughable way he had when somebody was shooting for fun, let alone for business. Joe chuckled, feeling better, more like himself. Down at the base of the mound, on his knees in a foot of mud and water, crouching, he just let the scoundrel fugitive slap the mound with bullets and shot; crouching behind a snag that would stop even a .30-30 hardnose or, anyhow, check it enough so it wouldn't absolutely break a man down.

The two runaways whispered sibilantly, excitedly, remarking presently out loud that nobody had shot back. 'Course, Shuffling Pete said, he'd rather have skipped Watch Mound, but all the trails came past it, and it was the only place they could find cover that day; they just had to come through there. If them Brahmas hadn't been skittish, they wouldn't have expected any one there—not till today. Sheriff probably wouldn't be able to organize a posse soon enough to send down there—but of course by telephone. But damn the man who invented telegraphs and telephones! Them wires sure bothered anybody in a hurry and on the prod, heading off everybody.

"Why, we're all right," a shrill, piping voice declared. "Prob'ly them Brahmas is jes' nervous!"

"Hell! I know them two Brahmas," Pete replied. "Ride 'm all over, an' when they smell a man, that's how they act."

"Well, le's head in," the shrill voice said. "C'mon."

"Doggone!" Alligator Joe mused. "Mop Akeyes sure is bad. Why, that scoundrel's keerless! He don't cyar for nothin'! I gotta watch that *hombre!* Gettin' day fast! Time they git clost up, I c'n see 'em, if they go f'r short guns. I can see their long barrels, now! That shotgun looks bad, but the closter they git, the less hit scatters! I hate buckshot—messy damned things. Give a feller lead poison, sometimes, too!"

So listening and thinking, Alligator Joe crouched in silence, the rain dripping and the night lifting, though with dawn the mist over the grass grayed and thickened as a whiff of chill made fog.

"C'mon!" the shrill-voiced escaped prisoner said, and Pete's heavier voice spoke, talking steer driving language.

"Hep! Come— Haw, haw, theh!"

The two Brahmas splashed around, though the driving commands were given in whispers, with a faint whistling lip sound. By that token Joe knew the Swamp Angel had trained them for devil-tries, trained those mud-larking saddle steers for just this kind of flight. Shuffling Pete was more forehanded, more dangerous than any one ever gave him credit for being. Driving the marsh beasts ahead, the two men approached the mound, which was like a big nubbin in the vast spaciousness of level swales.

They were ready, all three of the men coming to short shrift—two to one, desperadoes against the law; habitual bad men and a deputy sheriff up against it. If his leg quivered, cramped there in the loose muck covered with a little water, the ripples would be seen by the sharp swamp eyes. If he stirred the muzzle of his carbine they would know it wasn't a snag. Any moment they might discover and recognize the human shape in that dark, scraggly bush among the scattered reed. Shu-u!

"Up, you!"

The time had come, and Alligator Joe just had to chance it. The Brahmas had snuffled him, and again swung sharp, but that made breastworks for Shuffling Pete, whose head showed above the back, just behind the hump of his saddle and rise of shoulders of his mount.

Yes, sir! Mop Akeyes was bad! He didn't care for anything! A .30-30 carbine muzzle didn't bother him a bit; the sights were obliged to shift to Shuffling Pete, instead of himself, for Pete had the advantage and must be fair warned, covered first!

So Mop swung his shotgun, which was pointed off at the instant. The muzzle had only six inches to go, and Joe's rifle had nearly as far—and Joe jerked his weapon as he would have flipped a revolver. It gave him a split second of advantage, and a mushroom .30-30 snicked the desperado right. At that the repeating shotgun barked in the evil way a nitro load has, especially when driving large, loose lead. Joe felt the wind of the charge going by, ruining the rim of his hat. And the wad smacked him in the face and if he hadn't been good he would have flinched, but his lever hand was halfway down when the wad biffed him, and he knew he was still alive—and, having something to do, he kept on doing it.

"Don't shoot!" Shuffling Pete bellowed.

No, sir! Shuffling Pete wasn't anywhere near as bad as that man Mop Akeyes! 'Course, Pete was sensible, in a way. He knowed when he was whipped. He stepped clear of the Brahma's tail, with his hands up. Otherwise, Joe would have had to kill a mighty well trained and valuable Brahma, which would have been a shame. And 'course Pete didn't object to loading his late pal on one of the Brahmas and tying him on with the deputy's own rope. The shotgun stuck, muzzle down, in the mud where Akeyes had fallen.

So, accordingly, Alligator Joe tossed Shuffling Pete half his lunch, the Swamp Angel being hungry—though he had killed a pair of canvasbacks the previous morning, which were good, as the two fugitives had made a fire and dipped the birds in saltwater for seasoning.

"Ain't that the best danged coffee yo' eveh drank?" Joe asked, having tossed the bottle over to his prisoner.

"Yassuh," Pete answered. "I know that coffee. That's the way Duckling makes hit, to Bayou Crossing."

"Exactly!" Joe said. "We'll go theh'n eat, on our way in, Pete."

"That's shore kindly."

"County expense, too."

"Huh! I'm sick of livin' on the county. That's why I lit out."

"I ain't so overly fond of hit myse'f," Joe said wrathfully. "Dad-blast yo' fellers! Las' night I should of been to see my best gal, but the sher'f, he dep'tized me, an' when I come't the Crossin', gittin' a box of candy, theh was the special dep'ty 'pointment!"

"I don't give a damn'f I ruined yo' in that gal's idees, Joe!"

"Don't blame yo' a bit, feelin' thataway." Joe sighed. "I'd be provoked myse'f, 'f I was in yo' place."

"Well, le's go. My land, yo' took a long chanct, headin' Mop, theh!"

Shuffling Pete swung on to his Brahma's back and shooed the burdened steer on its way, which it knew without instruction.

"Now, Juke, damn yo'!" Joe warned, and he followed his victim and his captive up the marsh, heading fifteen miles west for the pasture bars through which he had come.

Sure enough, the gate was locked. Joe shot the lock to pieces with a .30-30 bullet, and the two went four miles on up to the ranch, after Pete had wired the gate shut.

"Hey, yo'!" the old rancher demanded. "How the hell'd yo' git through that pasture gate?"

"Why—uh-h—" the special deputy sheriff began—"we found hit wide open. Ain't no cows come through, though. We wired hit shut."

"Lock theh?"

"Pieces of hit, scattering around, an' coupla chunks drove into the post. Jacket bullet splashed around, too."

"Now ain't that damnation?" The rancher sighed. "Now I gotta send to Chicago for a new lock! An' meanwhile my cows scatterin' all to hell an' gone! Well, boys, time to eat—"

So they ate and, after dinner, the two drove on to Bayou Crossing. Nobody happened to notice them coming through the pouring rain till the deputy hailed the commissary keeper from the tie rail.

"Hey, yo'!" Joe said. "Yo' tell that danged sher'f to come ridin', an' tell'm to bring a coroner an' a undertaker."

"He-eh!" the storekeeper chuckled. "A day like this, that coroner 'll wear a rubber collar, or hit'll sure wilt."

The sheriff arrived, grumbling and wet, that night at ten o'clock. The laugh was on the coroner, for he had worn a derby hat, and the water ran down from it inside his linen collar, and his back was wet, under his slicker.

Alligator Joe transferred the prisoner and received two reward receipts, for fifty dollars each for returning the fugitives, one dead and one alive. Then Joe turned to the commissary keeper.

"Here's that carbine official gun an' what's left of the ammunition," he said.

"No yo' don't!" the storekeeper retorted. "Yo' clean that gun, fust, inside an' out. I ain't no time. I'm wore out, polishing up those department rifles. Them receipts reads 'in good condition and greased'."

"Huh!" The deputy sighed and took the cleaner, rags and grease tubes.

"I got one satisfaction." Joe grinned, watching the sheriff and another deputy cleaning the repeating shotgun, the rifle and the four six-guns which had come from the possession of the runaways. "I didn't give no receipt for them weapons, so I ain't responsible for 'em, not cleanin' nor nothing. Huh!"

"Yeh!" the sheriff growled as he poked seven inches of clay out of the shotgun muzzle. "I neveh did see a country like this—not no webfoots like you fellers! Look't this plug! How'd that git into that barrel any how?"

"Oh, Mop Akeyes, when he pitched down, kinda speared it into the ground, that's all!" His deputy grinned.

"Yo' call that ground?" the sheriff exploded.

"Yo're lucky at that," Joe suggested.

"Cleanin' these saltwatered guns?"

"Sure," Joe said. "Supposin' it'd been clear an' not sprinklin' today—why, the rain jes' washed all the outsides of those weapons, clean an' slick's a whistle."

"Clean? Clean?" the sheriff said wrathfully. "Say, next time yo' goin' to see yo' gal, I'll fix yo'! I'll dep'tize yo', sure's yo're borned."

"Well, I'm goin' to see that same lady tonight." Joe swaggered over to the counter. "I want a box of choclates, wrapped watertight."

"Tonight?" The sheriff grinned. "'Tain't midnight yet—"

"Well, tomorrow night," Joe amended.

"I tell yo', Joe," the sheriff mused. "Yo're 'pointed deputy for a week—special! I'm going to send yo' in, guardin' this yeah Swamp Angel. That'll be afteh the inquest an' funeral tomorrow mohnin'."

"Yo' dad-blasted plottin', schemin' old billygoat!" Joe yelped.

"But if yo' 'pologize, earnest an' proper, maybe I'll call yo' week's work done, nine dollars earned, an' forty miles at ten cents a mile—besides expenses, seventy-five cents a day, grub money, and lodging for a week—"

"And dollar a day for the mule, Sher'f?"

"Yeh! I bet that mule's got more sense 'n yo' have, Joe."

"Yas, suh!" Joe grinned. "He done woke me up when those fellers was coming, down that swale edge trail nobody but Swamp Angel eveh did get the directions of. An' havin' woke me up, naturally, I was then ready. I'll shore be glad to feed that old mule on the county, as regards the oats, prob'ly some corn. But, Sher'f, yo' shore give me heart failure heading me as to seein' my gal. As 'tis, I'll be twenty-four hours late, an' she expectin' me."

"Shucks!" the sheriff said. "Anybody's liable to be mired down twenty-four hours or so."

"'Course, I'm countin' on that!" Joe exclaimed. "An' lemme tell yo', I'm going to ride one o' them Brahma's an' lead that man-mule of mine. I'll tell her, 'course, when I was mired I made sure, coming, having picked up that saddle steer."

"Level head yo' got." The sheriff grinned. "I'd been married myse'f if I'd been that smart!"

Shir Ali

Men called him the greatest horsethief in Afghanistan

By S. B. H. HURST

SHIR ALI was an Afghan of the Durani Clan, and he looked upon work as a disease peculiar to the lower races. Fighting was his natural inclination, but while the Amir of Afghanistan's generals had long been engaged upon the difficult task of trying to suppress the rebellion of Ayub Khan, such a war had no attraction for Shir Ali. Several of his relatives who were fighting on the other side had privately sent him word that there was no loot in this war for either side . . .

What was a man to do? What was Shir Ali to do? He had had difficulties, as any man of blood might have. He had no money. It seemed the better part of valor that he get out of the country. All this before he met the Amir's Jackal in the dark of the narrow Kabul street.

The Jackals of the Amir were a nasty breed. They did the dirty work of the Amir, as their name implied. The people had given them that name. For when the Amir had no work for them they found it. One of them would accuse an innocent man of some crime—any crime so that it was bad enough. Other Jackals

would perjure themselves as witnesses. As the Jackals were paid no salary, but a certain sum for conviction, they were active. And hated. But the Jackal who met Shir Ali in the street was perhaps unfortunate. He was most certainly careless. The character of Shir Ali was well known. The Jackals traveled in packs; this one was alone. He saw Shir Ali and he became rash. He needed the money. The street was deserted. No one but Shir Ali in sight . . .

A few minutes later it was more deserted. There was nothing between the high walls of the windowless houses but a dead Jackal, and the chill night wind that blows down upon Kabul from the Hindu Kush.

Shir Ali hurried. He had no guilty conscience, because killing a Jackal in self-defense is a virtuous deed. But he had need of haste because in Kabul virtue is seldom triumphant. He hastened to the house of a friend of the Clan of Gilzai. The Gilzai are the merchants of Afghanistan. Ben Mohamet was a rich man. Shir Ali hammered on his door. There was no time for discretion or polite arrival. Twelve feet above the door was a grating—three iron bars in a narrow slit in the wall. Through this Ben Mohamet spoke cautiously.

"Who comes?"

Shir Ali looked up. He could see nothing but the shadows of the wall and a few stars, but he knew the voice.

"It is thy friend, Shir Ali, and he is in need of friendship! Let me in."

Ben Mohamet did not hesitate. Shir Ali had once done him the favor of saving his life, and Ben Mohamet was a good Mohammedan. The ethics of the Koran are sound, and Ben Mohamet lived by their law. He knew the risk of associating with Shir Ali, although he did not as yet know of the dead Jackal. He hastened down and opened the door—just wide enough for the wide shoulders of Shir Ali to squeeze through.

"Come in, friend," he said.

"Peace be upon thine house!" said Shir Ali in sonorous Pushtu.

Ben Mohamet chuckled.

"Do I bid welcome to a *mullah*, or to Shir Ali?" he asked.

Shir Ali laughed. Then, grimly:

"I must be away from Kabul ere the dawn. What is your advice?"

"I have heard that you have made yourself unpopular, friend," answered Ben Mohamet diplomatically. "But I did not know the haste was such as to forbid the enjoyment of the entertainment of my poor house!"

Shir Ali again laughed.

"There is a Jackal lying dead half a mile away. I killed him! Would you think that enough to make even a man of small wit hurry? I may be willing, but I am not able to fight all the creatures of the Amir successfully."

Ben Mohamet was slowly trimming an ancient brass lamp which hung from the low ceiling. He arranged the light carefully. He was thinking. Shir Ali waited.

"Have you any money?" Ben Mohamet asked finally.

"None," said Shir Ali.

"Then you must permit me to lend you some."

Shir Ali shrugged his shoulders.

"It may be a long loan," he said. "And I see no prospects of marrying and raising a family. I have no son to be security, should my life end, as it may, before I am able to repay thee."

"All my life is thy debt," answered Ben Mohamet. "You gave me back that life when robbers would have taken it from me. Forget any debt which, otherwise, this purse would bring to thee. Take it. . . Pardon—a moment!"

He thrust a heavy purse into Shir Ali's hand, and walked to the stair. Shir Ali secured the purse under his clothes. Ben Mohamet called softly up the stairs to his wife.

"I go out—for the space of an hour. Do not open the door before I return."

"Not even to my father!" she answered dutifully.

Ben Mohamet blew out the lamp. He opened the door.

"Come," he said.

The two men went out into the dark, and Ben Mohamet's wife came downstairs and barred the door.

"Is there any particular place you want to go?" asked Ben Mohamet, as the two men hurried through the dark streets.

"No," answered Shir Ali.

"There is a caravan already routed," went on Ben Mohamet. "But if you wished to go in another direction I would have the route of the caravan changed."

"You own the caravan, then? Is it of value?" asked Shir Ali.

"Of much value, of course," replied Ben Mohamet. "But I don't own it."

"How could you change its route, then?"

"Merely by buying the outfit and paying the owner what profit he expects to make on the venture," answered Ben Mohamet.

"Allah be praised, but thou art a friend!" gasped Shir Ali.

THE SHADOWS of the ancient houses were ghostly, and the night wind might have been the breath of the spirit of Scheherezade, trying from her place among the dead to add another tale to her tally of a thousand and one told so long ago. In just such an atmosphere did she tell the first on her wedding night. The murmur of humanity hidden behind vast walls, rising and falling like the voice of an ocean, yet more unfathomable . . . Tinkle of music, odor of musk and roses and things grown old—*houris* peeping through the bars of many years . . .

And now the smell of camels and harness and men and merchandise—Shir Ali and his devoted friend had reached the caravan, which was ready to start on its journey.

"Think again," whispered Ben Mohamet. "Is there any place that seems safe to you? Any place you would go?"

"I would go to hell for you," breathed Shir Ali fiercely. "For the rest, it does not matter!"

"Wait here, in the darkest corner, while I make arrangements with the leader of the caravan," answered Ben Mohamet.

He turned to go. At that moment out of the darkness ten men rushed them. Ten of the Jackals of the Amir.

Neither Shir Ali nor Ben Mohamet had any chance to fight. Heavy blankets were thrown over their heads, heavy arms encircled them. They were kicked and beaten and made to walk.

Nearly smothered, they both knew the futility of doing other than obey. To refuse to walk meant more beating. They knew that they were not to be killed that night. Death, no doubt would, come next day—when the Jackals had told their vicious tale to the Amir, when, probably, no defense would be allowed the accused.

So they walked, with little hope in their hearts, but great rage. Would Allah grant them one small moment for revenge? They could see nothing, but they knew where the walk was taking them. Through all that was left of the walls of Kabul, through the Gate of the Sirdar, and past the ruins of the ancient fort of Bala Hissar, to the prison near the new palace of Abdur Rahman, the Amir, where a motley crowd awaited the next morning, which was a morning of justice.

They would not have to wait long, for dawn had come over the hills, and Kabul had awakened when Ben Mohamet and Shir Ali were literally thrown into the crowded cell, and the blankets were pulled from over them as they were thrown; into a large cell filled with a crowd of miserable beings, among whom were, however, some few who still held their chins up and had not given way utterly to despair. There is no Magna Carta or Bill of Rights in Afghanistan. And justice is the whim of the Amir—a cruel and despotic lord. Men and women were in the cell, thieves, murderers, beggars. Filth and hunger. In this Shir Ali and Ben Mohamet waited.

"Thy reward of friendship," whispered Shir Ali grimly.

"Not that," answered Ben Mohamet, "but the cowardly Jackals, who have long

coveted my money, and sought means to fix a lie on me so that a share of my wealth could come to them after my death."

Shir Ali laughed grimly.

"*Ai!* They sought long to bind thee with a lie clever enough for the Amir to believe, but now they have a true tale, they caught thee helping me to escape. And they need no lie concerning me. Half the truth of my life told the Amir, and off goes my head!"

There was no time for more talk. Early morning was the judgment hour. The guards came. Shir Ali and Ben Mohamet were nearest the cell door. The guards took them and marched them across the road to the great paved courtyard.

A crowd watched. The morning sun touched the gaudy uniforms of the officers about the Amir. Abdur Rahman himself was simply garbed, save for the jewels in his turban. He sat in one of his state chairs. Every one else stood. The guards pushed Ben Mohamet and Shir Ali toward the throne, bowed low to the Amir and stood back. The Amir blinked sleepily, but his thick lips curled cruelly.

The guards stepped back, leaving the prisoners alone. Shir Ali lifted his right hand in a swift movement and struck Ben Mohamet heavily in the face, knocking him down. Then, before the astonished guards could move, he plucked the purse from beneath his clothes and flung it at the Amir's feet, shouting:

"Here is the purse, Lord Amir! This fat Gilzai merchant would not have missed the money. However, to save thee the trouble of asking questions—for I see thou didst little sleeping last night!—I admit the theft!"

The guards had by this time seized Shir Ali, and the astonished but understanding Ben Mohamet had got to his feet. The boldness of Shir Ali's words was in itself an immediate death warrant, but some queer quirk in the brain of the Amir caused him to enjoy them. Perhaps it was because no man had ever before spoken so to Abdur Rahman, the greatest of the Amirs of Afghanistan. He waved the guards away.

"Tell me thy story, bold man!" he commanded.

"There is little to tell, Lord," shouted Shir Ali. "I needed money. I knew this Gilzai—Ben Mohamet, I think is his name—had lots of it. There was a caravan starting for the Lataband. I went to the house of this Ben Mohamet, and told him that the master of the caravan needed speech with him, and for him to come. A messenger, I was! Ben Mohamet came. I took him by the throat, and took his purse. Just as I hid it under my clothes, and this Ben Mohamet was starting to run—no doubt for help—thy men came upon us, and took us both. A merry jest, Lord Amir! But there is the purse, so let the fat fool go back to his home, with this lesson—to beware of messengers who come in the night!"

The crowd gasped. Shir Ali's comment upon the Amir's way of spending the night might pass—Eastern monarchs enjoy coarse jokes—but this last, this bidding the Amir what to do, to let Ben Mohamet go—this was an audacity which would meet swift punishment.

But the Amir merely blinked with amusement.

"What an awful liar thou art," he said quietly to Shir Ali.

The crowd gasped again. Shir Ali laughed.

"Lord," he said, "if thou hadst an army of men like me you could conquer the world!"

"Tell me the true tale and, by the beard of the Prophet, I will let thy *friend* go in peace, and he shall ever after enjoy my protection!" commanded the Amir.

"My Lord Amir," shouted Shir Ali, "Thou hast the wisdom of Sooliman!" And Shir Ali meant it. A fine compliment, too. For the Afghans claim descent from Israel, and duly reverence Solomon. "Thou, O King, hath read me, from my head to my bowels! Yes, this Ben Mohamet is my dear friend. He knew that I was in some slight trouble, and that it would be better for me to be in Kandahar than in Kabul, even better in Peshawar, or, no doubt, Colombo. So, he lent me

this purse. Allah forgive me for striking him, but I did it for his own good—as thou, O Lord Amir, knoweth! Ben Mohamet took me to the caravan, to arrange for my departure. That is the true tale, as my king knows."

The Amir nodded. Then he waved his hand to Ben Mohamet.

"Go, just man, and friend to one in need. Should any man offend thee from this day forth, that man offends me. Go in peace!"

Ben Mohamet praised Allah and the Amir impartially as he backed away from the presence, and the Amir turned again to Shir Ali.

"What was thy crime?" he asked. "Nay, try not to tell me *all* the evil deeds thou hast done—I can not stay here a month to listen! Let me hear of one crime. What?"

Shir Ali bowed and answered gravely—

"I walked in my sleep, my Lord."

"What!" roared the Amir. "Do you jest with me? Or art thou afflicted of the Lord, and know not what thou art doing—thus to jest with a king sitting in judgment?"

"Nay, Lord, it is the truth," answered Shir Ali calmly.

He knew that he had either gone far enough to lose his head, and that nothing else he might say could make things worse; or else he had so charmed the Amir with his impertinence that he was safe, and that he could continue in the same strain, and amuse the Amir the more.

"Yes, great Lord. In my sleep I walked. But I walked so far in my sleep that I grew tired. I grew so tired that I was too tired to walk farther, so I borrowed a horse! This, of course, in my sleep, Lord, not knowing—"

The Amir rocked in his chair, and his court duly laughed with him.

"Go to my kitchens and fill that great belly of thine!" roared the Amir. "Then wait around there until I have need of thee. But be very careful not to go to sleep. My horses are too valuable."

"*Shabash!*" Shir Ali shouted loudly.

He strode away toward the kitchens. The world of the Amir made way for him, for he had been given the accolade of the king's smile. He heard a shout behind him, and an official came running with the purse. Shir Ali received it carelessly. He had left it behind purposely, so that his Afghan soul might be filled to the brim with delight—a fugitive from justice served by a court official of the Amir!

NIGHT in the palace of the Amir. Fretted silver lamps, glowing like giant rubies. Gorgeous rugs on the floor and walls of a small room into which no regicidal knife could penetrate—a room from which all were barred save a favored and highly trusted few. And a delighted Shir Ali alone in that room with the Amir.

"I sent for thee because I think you have brains," said the Amir. "But the task I have for thee demands that you neither sleep—much—nor steal horses. Can you read?"

Shir Ali grinned.

"My Lord knows that I have always left hard work to others," he said.

"So! But you know the country?" asked the Amir.

"In my business one must know the country," answered Shir Ali. "Every pass, every valley, every little hill. Lend me one of thine horses, give me a few minutes' start, and all your army could never catch me again, Lord Amir!"

"Quit thy bragging for a moment, even if it strangle thee to swallow thy words," growled the Amir. "Thou knowest that that rebellious swine Ayub Khan gathered an army about him nearly a year ago. He would, he said, make himself Amir, and stick my head on a pike over the Lahori gate, so that all men might mock me in death. I laughed, and sent my general, the Sirdar Dost Mohamet, against him. That was nearly a year ago, and since then the rebel Ayub Khan has gathered strength. It is necessary that I take command of my army myself, and beat him, and stick his head on the gate, lest he get stronger and make

good his boast. Therefore, I leave Kabul shortly to take command of my army.

"It is necessary that I send word by a faithful messenger to Sirdar Dost Mohamet, telling him that I come, when I come, and the route I travel so that the Sirdar may guard that route. I have honored thee by choosing thee for that messenger.

"See this map? You know the country; but it is needful to show thee where is the Sirdar and my army. You can not read, but, look here: this mark is Kabul. On the map here. This is Herat, and here is Kandahar. Does that thick head of thine understand?"

"Yes, Lord Amir," exclaimed Shir Ali with approval, for the tone of "thick head" made the term a friendly intimacy.

"Here—" the Amir laid a finger on the map— "is the Sirdar and my army."

Shir Ali looked closely. He pointed with his thumb.

"This writing," he said. "This stuff that looks like feathers or the backbone of a fish—that must mean hilly country, eh, Lord?"

"Exactly," answered the Amir.

Shir Ali closed his eyes.

"Now I can see," he said. "That damned map of thine, my Lord, is too stupid for me. But with my eyes closed I can see the country, because I know it. So, I know where the army waits thee, Lord Amir. Give me the letter. . . . Do I take one of thy horses, O King?"

"Pick out a horse that fits thy weight," answered the Amir. "For you carry my word in a letter!"

"Ah!" Shir Ali drew a vast and contented breath. "And the King has some noble horses. After eating this morning I saw them all. What a tempting sight it was! . . . Good, my King—and, er—concerning any money I may need?"

The Amir handed Shir Ali the letter.

"Secure it under thy clothes. As for money, I saw one of my officers hand you a purse this morning."

Shir Ali laughed.

"I lost the lot gambling in thy stables, my Lord," he answered.

The Amir struck a bell. An officer appeared.

"Let this man take what horse he desires," said the Amir. "He rides with a message to the Sirdar. And give him some money." To Shir Ali he added, "God go with you, for you may have need of Him. Keep thy thick head centered on just one thing—that you carry a message for the Amir to his general, Sirdar Dost Mohamet. I have picked thee from among many men because, well, because thy way of talking and so forth makes me think you will act in this business exactly as I desire."

Shir Ali saluted and followed the officer to the stables.

THE NIGHT was cold. It was winter, and Kabul is nearly seven thousand feet above sea level. The palace of the Amir is outside the city, but the direction of the Sirdar necessitated Shir Ali's riding through the peculiarly filthy streets, which were so narrow that Shir Ali could, sitting his horse, almost touch either wall with his outstretched fingers. Shir Ali wrapped his sheepskin closely about him. Now and then one of the people of the night—thieves, beggars, whatnot—shrank against a wall to give the horse room. Just darker shadows in the dark, for there are no street lights in Kabul. But none offered to attack the huge figure astride the splendid animal.

At the Lahori gate Shir Ali pulled up, but did not dismount. He called to the proprietor of the "coffee shop that never closes", whom he knew, and the proprietor, without being ordered, brought out a cup of steaming, sirupy coffee. The horse, and the bearing of Shir Ali! The proprietor believed a noble waited without, and hastened to serve. Shir Ali leaned down and accepted the beverage. He took a sip. Then he paused and leaned down again.

"How's the slate, Coomer Ali?" he asked.

"Before God!" ejaculated the astounded Coomer Ali. "It's Shir Ali!"

"Thy friend," answered Shir Ali with

great comfort. "But I asked thee how's the slate? What do I owe thee from of old?"

Coomer Ali grasped Shir Ali's arm.

"Forget the debt, thou foolhardy man! Ride on, and ride fast. Horse stealing is all right for those brought up in the business, but care is required in every business. You have—I see by the trappings—done something you can brag about for the rest of thy life; stolen one of the Amir's horses! Never did such an accomplished horsethief drink my coffee! Did ever a man before thee steal one of the Amir's steeds? . . .

"But don't sit here bragging and showing off. I am thy friend. Forget the debt. Ride away and sell the horse. Then come back and pay me, if you wish. But take off the trappings. Even the boldest man may well be afraid to buy a horse stolen from the Amir's stables."

Shir Ali stuck out his chest. He had reached the height of self-satisfaction.

"The Amir lent me the horse," he said.

"Thou wonderful liar," answered Coomer Ali admiringly. "But for why did the Amir lend thee the horse?"

"So that I could ride swiftly with a message to the Sirdar Dost Mohamet," answered Shir Ali cheerfully. "But you mustn't tell any one that."

Coomer Ali slapped his thigh. He laughed so hard that he had to cling to Shir Ali's leg.

"Ride on! Ride on!" he gasped. "Thy debt is forgiven. I won't take a penny! I have paid money for less amusement than this, O prince of liars! Ride on! I go! It is dangerous to be seen with thee—although I believe you could lie thy way out of hell!"

And Coomer Ali took the empty cup and went back into his shop, shaking with mirth.

Shir Ali rode out of the city. Below stretched the plain.

"I will never tell the truth again!" he muttered gravely.

On and on through the silent night Shir Ali rode. That magnificent animal. Shir Ali exulting. Then a question—

"I forgot to ask the Amir what my reward would be for this little job!"

At dawn they reached a small farm. From a very suspicious farmer Shir Ali bought a bowl of milk and two handfuls of that staple article of diet, *krut*.

"Now we will feed and rest," said Shir Ali. "I see food for my horse in your stable. I will remain with him. He is far too valuable to leave alone. Tonight I go on again; have a feed of mutton ready at the time of the evening meal!"

The farmer stroked his beard.

"Go away now," he said. "I don't mind selling thee food, but it is too dangerous to harbor thee."

Shir Ali, who had not slept for forty-eight hours, was very tired.

"I stay here," he said. "The horse is the Amir's—lent to me because I travel upon the king's business."

The farmer shook his head.

"I never laugh before breakfast," he said gravely. "Thou art, indeed, a magnificent liar! Have you any money?"

Shir Ali pulled out his purse. The farmer's eyes gleamed. He then asked a double price for the accommodation. Shir Ali paid him half of what he asked.

"The remainder tonight when I leave—for faithful performance," he said sleepily.

The farmer was thinking fast.

"Art thou a Khan?" he asked politely.

"No, a noble—a Sirdar! Leave me," said Shir Ali haughtily.

The farmer obeyed. Shir Ali rolled into the straw, chuckling.

"A Khan, eh? An elected noble of the people! But that was not good enough, even if I had never been so flattered before. So I called myself a Sirdar—a noble whose ancestors have been born noble for several hundred years. I can't go any higher, unless I call myself the Amir!"

HE SLEPT instantly, to awake suddenly at the close of the short winter afternoon—the instinct of a people inured to crimes of bloodshed in a country where deeds of violence are committed almost

with impunity. Deep in sleep, he had heard a whisper and a footstep. He made no sound as he moved the straw and prepared his big body for instant action, but the back of his mind was wondering about the sound of the footstep—unless it were a woman. That ready suggestion of the Afghan mind.

No, he understood. The foot had slithered—it had snowed since he had gone to sleep. He waited in the dense gloom of the stable.

The horse made no sound. Then a hand fumbled with the door, and the door opened. The faint light revealed a child. The child called shrilly—

"Ho, Sirdar of the Durani!"

Shir Ali grunted craftily, as one awakened from pleasant sleep. He moved heavily in the straw, as if turning over to go to sleep again.

"Ho, Durani!" cried the child, shivering in the cold.

"Ah-o! What is it?" And Shir Ali apparently awoke.

"My father sent me. The sheep has been killed and the meal awaits thee."

"Go thou and tell him I come with good appetite."

The child vanished. Shir Ali made a great fuss of arising. Then, his sword at the point, he walked with noisy caution to the door, which opened outward.

"By Allah, I am hungry!" exclaimed Shir Ali.

He hurled himself at the door. It swung and smashed into a human body. Shir Ali sprang out and round the door. A man, knocked down by the door, was scrambling in the mud and snow. Clutched in his right hand was the expected knife. The child, crying, ran into the house.

"Lie still," commanded Shir Ali grimly. "The child said the sheep had been killed. The child was mistaken!"

And Shir Ali pricked the wallowing man with his sword point.

"Sirdar! Sirdar!" whimpered the farmer. "The sheep has been killed. The meal awaits thee. I sent the child to summon thee to eat."

"The knife in thy hand was a present for me, then, in case I had chanced to mislay mine in the straw," said Shir Ali, with bitter sarcasm.

"My life is in the hands of my lord," wailed the man.

"Some of my money, too." Shir Ali let the point of his sword prick more deeply.

"Ow! Yes, Sirdar!"

"I am no Sirdar, and you know it! Where is the money I paid you? So, under your coat. Take it out. Hurry, or my sword will slip into your stomach. That's better. It's dark, but by the feel of it you have returned me all I paid you for accommodation. Now get up. Leave the knife in the mud. So, walk ahead of me. I will eat. But you will eat first, although I doubt you would poison an entire sheep. And for this you will get no pay, when you would have got more had you not tried to kill me. Don't be so clumsy next time. Better be honest. Yes, be honest!

"Which," added Shir Ali to himself as the man led the way to the house, "is not bad for a horsethief!"

He ate largely, but all he paid for the food and the stabling of his horse was advice regarding honesty.

As he left the farm it began to snow hard, with a bitter wind that blew right into the horse's face. Shir Ali crouched in the saddle, shivering and coaxing the animal forward into the storm.

"Only a king's messenger would travel on such a night as this," he growled.

The wind whipped the snow cruelly into their faces. The horse refused to go on. Shir Ali dismounted and began to lead it.

"Come on, good horse. It's no use your refusing. We're going to deliver this letter to Dost Mohamet if it snows all the snow that ever fell in all the mountains of the world. Get on. I have not beaten thee—yet!"

IT WAS about midnight of the fourth night when Shir Ali saw the distant twinkle of the camp-fires. Two hours later he galloped blithely into the first outpost.

"Who goes?"

The challenge rang in the frosty air, arousing a group of men about a fire.

"Shir Ali, with a message for the Sirdar from the Amir!"

The sentry gaped. The men about the fire jumped to their feet. One of them shouted—

"The most entertaining horsethief in Afghanistan, and the biggest liar!"

The men surrounded Shir Ali, laughing and shouting. Some were friends of many years. They grasped his bridle. They shouted.

"This is his masterpiece! Look ye, brothers—the horse is the Amir's! And he comes riding in, saying he carries dispatches for the Amir. Ho-ho-ho! I shall die laughing. Was there ever such a man! Shir Ali, I love thee for thou hast made me laugh. And you have stolen one of the Amir's horses!"

The entire speech was meant as a compliment, but for once in his life Shir Ali wanted men to know he was telling the truth.

"Keep thy big mouth shut, Ben Abu!" he shouted angrily. "I did not steal this horse. The Amir lent him to me, so I could carry a letter to the Sirdar. Yes, he had me in his private room, into which only the most trusted are admitted. And he showed me on a map where the army of the Sirdar lay, and gave me a horse. So I rode with speed, through wind and snow, and—"

The men were doubled up with mirth Some rolled on the ground.

"And he tells it so solemnly!" howled Ben Abu. "If I didn't know him I would be tempted to believe him. Steals the Amir's horses, and carries the Amir's messages— Was there ever such a man?"

"Shut thy mouth!" Shir Ali was growing very angry. "If I had stolen this horse would I ride into the Amir's army on it? Fools!"

At this the laughter increased. The noise could be heard a mile away.

"Answer me, Ben Abu!" roared Shir Ali, dragging at his sword.

"This—this—O thou lovely liar on a stolen horse! This—and a message, too, he says . . . But the best is his riding into the army of Ayub Khan and saying he thinks it is the Amir's!"

"What?" shouted Shir Ali, beside himself.

"This is the army of Ayub Khan," howled Ben Abu. "But the joke is too deep for my brains!"

Shir Ali felt his blood run cold. The most miserable feeling he had ever known in all his tempestuous career.

But his fighting instinct—never to let the enemy know he was hurt—rallied him. He laughed loudly and dismounted.

"Well," he shouted. "Well, brother thieves, I made you laugh, anyway! Now give me something to eat."

One of Ayub Khan's officers, irritated by the noise, rode up to the outpost.

"You missed the fun!" Ben Abu shouted to the officer in the intimate Afghan way of that strange country where the ruler is an autocratic despot, yet where every man considers himself as good as the next with a more thorough democracy than is known elsewhere in the world.

"What fun, son of Abu?"

"Our old school friend, whom the *mullah* used to beat more often than he did the rest of us, Shir Ali, the most notorious horsethief in Afghanistan, steals one of the Amir's horses and then rides in here to us, pretending he thought we were the Amir's army. The man's jokes are too complicated for me, but you will see the fun of it."

"I see the horse," said the officer. "A stolen horse, thou sayest? By God, it is! One of the Amir's best. Ho-ho! Shir Ali is thy name? Well, Shir Ali, I thank thee. I have long wanted such a horse as this."

The significant words went past Shir Ali like a muttering wind, impressing no meaning on his brain. He was too bemazed. The directions of the Amir had been explicit—ride this way; here is my army . . .

And Shir Ali had ridden that way. He had made no mistake. He had managed instinctively to cover his confusion with a laugh and a demand for food, but that

had been no solution of the puzzle. A sudden notion. Perhaps the army of the Amir had been beaten since he left Kabul, and its position occupied by the army of Ayub Khan. He spoke to the officer.

"How long have you been camped here?"

"Four months," answered the officer. "This is a good joke—taking a horse from a horsethief. But we will feed you. Perhaps we will make you the leader of an expedition to go out and steal all the horses of the Amir's army!"

Again the huge laughter of a group of Afghans. Shir Ali knew the folly of protesting. His old schoolfellows would rally in support of the little autocrat officer. All Shir Ali could hope for was a chance to steal the horse again. But he did not lose his poise.

"I could do it, too! But where is the army of the Amir?"

The officer pointed to the north star.

"That way! It has been there for months, just as we have been here—both waiting for the other to start something."

Shir Ali turned his back on the horse and the officer.

"Give me food, Ben Abu, and let me rest," he growled.

In his soul was a deep bitterness. He had looked at the north star and understood. The Amir had deliberately sent him in the wrong direction, had sent him to the army of the enemy Ayub Khan. Shir Ali was no longer in a maze, but he was raging inwardly. A pawn in the game. A pawn, with a message intended to deceive. The Amir had written a false dispatch to insure his own safety while *en route* to his army. What happened to Shir Ali was unimportant. The Amir wanted Ayub Khan to get the dispatch and send men seeking the Amir where the Amir was not, while the Amir journeyed in safety to Sirdar Dost Mohamet.

SHIR ALI crouched by the fire. He ate, and presently he laughed harshly.

"The Amir deceived me," he thought. "Well, it will be virtuous to return the compliment. *Pukhtunwali*, the law given long ago, demands an eye for an eye. Yes, by Allah, I will never let the Amir know that I found out. I will deliver this message to Sirdar Dost Mohamet. The Sirdar will believe it to be true, and what a mix-up the Amir will have made for himself. Ho-ho! I may get something out of this yet! At any rate, I will get even. But first, I must re-steal that horse. No, he is tired. I will steal another horse and, this time, head for the north star!"

There was no time to lose. The outpost about the fire was having a good time—bragging of exploits in the Afghan way, telling stories compared to which the "Decameron" is chaste. But Shir Ali, to whom ordinarily the foregoing amusements were the breath of life, tore himself away. He was possessed of a mission. That mission was utterly to fool the Amir of Afghanistan by delivering a dispatch to Sirdar Dost Mohamet, which was intended for the rebel eyes of Ayub Khan.

So Shir Ali slipped away from the comfort of the fire and fellowship. Among the numerous camp followers—pests unchanged since, in the same locality, they irritated Alexander the Great—Shir Ali walked unnoticed. He saw many horses, but his expert eye was not satisfied. He desired a horse equally as good as the horse the officer had appropriated.

For two reasons. First, so that it would carry his weight in proper manner to Sirdar Dost Mohamet. Second, because his honor demanded he lose nothing by the exchange. Only among the higher officers of Ayub Khan would such a horse be found. And grooms are careless and easily beguiled. Such was Shir Ali's experience. He had never found it necessary to kill a groom. Indeed, any self-respecting horsethief scorned to harm seriously the custodian of the horse he stole. An owner was different—his loss might make him dangerous! A shrewd blow and, by the time the groom recovered consciousness the horsethief would be away; by the time the groom acted the horsethief would be far away . . .

However, this stealing a horse from

among the higher officers of an army might demand a different technique. It might even be necessary to steal the groom!

So thought Shir Ali when he saw the two splendid horses in the starlight. Their bridles were tied together, and a man was stroking the face of one of them.

"The good groom loves his charge," quoted Shir Ali. "And—there are two horses!"

He laughed inwardly. The Amir had lent him a horse. That horse was lost to the Amir. But, behold, into the camp of the army of the Amir comes riding Shir Ali, with *two* horses! And with a groom to care for the extra horse! Shir Ali decided on the instant that he would steal that groom, also. A horsethief with a groom! Never in all the world had there been such a horsethief until the advent of Shir Ali. He would ride up to Sirdar Dost Mohamet in state, and give him the dispatch the Amir did not want him to receive. That way Shir Ali would be more than even. *Pukhtunwali* would be satisfied. A head for a head, as the Rajputs say.

"It will take skill, but who has more than I? Besides, if I left the groom alive, or even dead, I might soon have a troop of cavalry after me. I will take the groom, also!"

He approached cautiously. He would have to do the job with extreme care. Lying on the ground was an empty sack—one of those particularly stout gunny sacks used for grain in Afghanistan. Shir Ali picked up the sack. It had solved his problem. Kismet was obviously with him. Fate and the clouds in the sky and the dark night. Shir Ali was as calm as if playing chess. Fate was obviously with him. The groom did not hear him. But, then, why should a groom in the midst of an army fear a horsethief? Shir Ali's vanity was again tickled. A lone horsethief in the midst of an army . . .

He made a sudden rush. He was marvelously light on his feet for so big a man. The sack descended upon the head and shoulders of the groom. For a moment he was too surprised to do anything. Shir Ali fastened the sack about the groom's waist, whispering.

"One word and my knife meets your heart. Behave, and I will not harm you. I will even make a slit in the sack to let you breathe!"

The groom was struggling, but those sacks are air tight. He was almost smothered. He knew the futility of effort. All he could do was submit and trust his captor would make a slit in the sack before he did smother.

Shir Ali easily lifted the groom to the saddle of one of the horses. He noted with satisfaction that both horses were saddled with the very finest saddles. Silver trappings.

"Some high officer owns these horses," he thought, as he quickly tied the groom's feet under the belly of the horse with the picket rope. "No, Shir Ali owns them!"

HE LEAPED to the saddle of the horse. The unfortunate groom, almost strangled, fell forward on his horse's neck. Shir Ali urged the horses forward. They walked quietly. Without stopping, Shir Ali made a breathing hole for the groom in the sack. He rode on slowly, supporting the groom. Presently the groom revived. He sat up. Shir Ali put the bridle in his hands.

"One little word and you die!" he whispered as the horses broke into a canter.

The groom was, of course, a splendid rider. That part of it would give Shir Ali no trouble. But if any of Ayub Khan's soldiers came that way Shir Ali felt that he would have a tough time explaining several things, and not the least the apparition of the sack riding the other horse.

A muffled voice—

"I will pay you well to let me go!"

It was no time for argument, or even discussion. Not even for a profitable bargain! Shir Ali sank the point of his sword into the groom's thigh. The groom suppressed a yell. He realized the sort of man he had to deal with.

"No more words. Even if you showed me the money I would still keep thee. Ride now, for we gallop."

They galloped, and the groom rode. He was helpless. And Shir Ali looked forward at the north star, exulting.

Through a gully between two careless outposts, and Shir Ali felt safe. The horses moved like birds. A faint light in the eastern sky. The false dawn.

"The wolf tail," muttered Shir Ali happily. "Long before noon I will deliver my important dispatch to Sirdar Dost Mohamet!"

A sound mingled with the rhythmic beat of the horses' hoofs. Gripping both bridles, Shir Ali slowed the animals to a walk. He listened acutely. Then he stopped the horses.

"Sounds as if I had ridden into another army by mistake," he muttered grimly. "No, it is two armies—and they are fighting!"

He listened. It was not a general engagement. How could it be when one army lay behind him. Evidently two bands of horsemen had met—not more than three hundred men altogether. But that was too many to be convenient for Shir Ali—with the dawn paling the sky. Very soon he would be visible to the combatants. Which way should he ride? He did not have time to decide this. At that moment one of the bands of horsemen began to retreat. The clash of swords died away in the noise of galloping hoofs. Mad cries continued, but one side was spurring for dear life.

Shir Ali did not move. He could not. All he could do was remain where he was and keep a tight rein on both horses. For the retreating detachment was riding directly toward him—would, in a few seconds, ride right into him. And the victors, who were pursuing, would do the same.

Then the dawn showed everything against the snow. Men dead and dying. Horses writhing. Shir Ali faced the oncoming riders as a man might face a wave of the sea. He hung on grimly and ducked his head. The groom was struggling to get free. Like a mad deluge the retreating cavalry streamed past, too busy escaping to bother with Shir Ali. As he waited for the pursuers he heard the command to halt. The victors would pursue no farther—it would not be wise.

Shir Ali thanked Kismet again, and looked up. These would of course belong to the Army of the Amir. He was correct in his deduction. He looked up—and saw the ferocious, sweating face of the Amir, Abdur Rahman himself!

"What in Jehamum!" roared the Amir.

Shir Ali laughed.

"Ah, my Lord the Amir!" he exclaimed. Then, in a confidential tone, "I have been having an awful time getting thy letter to the Sirdar. But I will do it, never fear! That map of thine, my Lord, must have got twisted. Or else something else was crooked! For my Lord sent me the wrong way. I had to fight my way through the army of Ayub Khan. They took thy horse, too. So I stole a couple for myself. My Lord said something about my not stealing horses while on this job, but the letter and the need of haste were so important that I knew my Lord would not mind—so long as I got the letter to the Sirdar! My Lord is out of breath! I have fought before breakfast myself, and know just how my Lord feels!"

"You damned horsethief," shouted the Amir furiously. "You thick head! You fool—you and your bragging. I wanted Ayub Khan to get that letter, fool. To mislead him. Well, you will steal no more horses, nor carry any more letters," he ended significantly.

Shir Ali understood. But he laughed.

"I told many men that I carried thy letter, but none would believe me!" he exclaimed. "They all said—"

"What did they say?" demanded the Amir.

"That I was as big a liar as you are!" answered Shir Ali.

"So," answered the Amir, his quiet tone belying his intentions. "This big, impertinent mouth of thine saved thy life the other day—because it amused me. This

time I find no amusement in thy words. Only a miracle can save thee now!"

He glared into Shir Ali's eyes. Shir Ali returned him look for look.

"A bold man you are, my horsethief! Too bold. Make the most of what life is left to thee to be bold in. What is that on the other horse—in the sack?"

Shir Ali shrugged his shoulders.

"The groom who had charge of the horses. It seemed best to bring him along, lest he rouse the army of Ayub Khan—and prevent me delivering thy message!"

"Take off the sack."

Shir Ali obeyed. There was a sudden exclamation from the surrounding officers, then a tense, ominous silence. The Amir's face was a picture of rage, cruelty, vindictive joy. The man on the horse said nothing. Then the Amir turned to Shir Ali and spoke in the friendly manner of the courtyard on the morning of justice.

"Truly God is good to thee. You may keep the horses, and the man who harms thee harms me! You have done what my army has failed to do this year past. In a sack. Thy groom is Ayub Khan, the rebel, himself!"

WELDING FLAMES

By WILLIAM WEST WINTER

CHAPTER I

THE BAD LANDS SURVEY

A LONG and lonely job, a tedious job, to men weary in body and in mind; and the weariness of mind was far worse than the weariness of body. The body is a resilient thing and an adaptable thing which adjusts itself to the demands made upon it. So, to an extent, is the mind; but there is this about the mind which does not hold good with the body: as the routine exercise on the daily problems grows customary the mind does not, like the body, amiably conform its activities to the demands made upon it. It reaches out as the ordinary process of thought becomes almost instinctive and grows restive and rebellious.

You would suppose that a "gunman" of a Geological Survey party engaged on the topographical survey of the Squaw Creek Quadrangle would have plenty to keep his mind occupied without giving it any excuse to wander off into forbidden pastures. Some minds, indeed, would have been satisfied with the problems of the job, but the mind of Fred Strong was not of that class.

He was a good man, though young—young men and strong men are required for that work—but he was also a man of imagination and of restless ambition, which is to say that he was not exactly the type of man for a Government job. Not that he didn't give his best to it or that his best was not good. He knew that he was good and he knew that his superiors knew that he was good. But with all the appreciation that was freely given by them and himself, he had always to reflect that survey work could lead to little more than the headship of a bureau at a salary of some five thousand dollars a year.

And the way to that obscure eminence led through weary years of such work as this; work that taxed a man physically, that roughened him and hardened him and that brought him, finally, to the monotonous routine of an executive job at low remuneration.

The author of "The Gunlock Saga" gives us a novelette of forest fire in the Western mountains

And yet Fred Strong was a trained engineer, a geologist of sorts, and as skilful a hand with "gun" and plane table as ever hewed his way into impossible wildernesses. "No future. No future", his secret thoughts continually called to him as he bent by night over his notes and sketches or toiled by day with meticulous care and straining eyesight over his transit or level.

And when—after long weeks of almost solitary herding with a few men, the majority of them rough assistants hired here and there for the work with ax and chain; and the others either young and irresponsible recent students regarding it all as an adventurous lark; or else older, stolid, unambitious men who had settled more or less contentedly into the ever changing and yet ever the same round of duties—he encountered, as now, a glimpse of things he wanted badly and yet saw little chance of achieving, he felt sometimes ready to curse the day he had joined the Survey. He had been attracted to it by the glamour of adventure and the romance of toil in the wilderness. And, strangely enough, it was in this very wilderness that the reminder had come to him.

He had pitched camp on Squaw Creek in a strategic spot. Three miles away towered the spiky peak of the Devil's Needle, and on that granite spire, put there with infinite toil, rose the flimsy but firmly anchored tripod of poles supporting the flag marking a station of the Main Triangulation for the Squaw Creek Quadrangle.

With even more toil and tribulation a trail had been cut and dug on that forbidding slope so that poles and tools and supplies could be packed up to the summit of the peak.

Days and weeks had gone to that task as days had gone to similar tasks on Veeder's Mountain, fifteen miles away, and on Mount Porcupine, ten miles distant in another direction. It is no light jest in life to cut and hew a pathway to untrodden summits of twelve thousand foot peaks set in the wilderness of the

Rockies. And then to haul up that pathway by manual labor the materials to build tripod towers that will stand firm and unshaken in the bitter winds that blow up there. Those tripods must support the staffs that give sights from the other stations and they must not bend or swerve an inch though the wind blow a fifty-mile gale.

Yet even that task was a pale semblance of toil compared to the bitter weeks and months of running the base line between the Devil's Needle and Porcupine. It was rough country and bitter country, cut up by steep cañons and roughened by steep and rocky plateaus and peaks. Between the Needle and Porcupine lay ten miles of disorder. Ravines, sheer as the side of a house and encumbered by brush and down timber, windfalls of burned over lodgepole lying in chaotic disorder like heaps of giant jackstraws over acres and sections of mountain side.

There were craggy cliffs of lava out of which sprung thick growing, towering spruces and firs and pines; and only here and there was there a gently sloping meadow or a pleasant open valley which might give a few hours' respite to the toil that was their lot. For a base line must run as straight as an arrow flight from one point to another, no matter what obstacles must be surmounted.

The shortest distance between the two selected points of the triangle must be ascertained with the absolute minimum of error and that means that every foot must be measured and remeasured, every rise in the gound discounted by leveled chain, broken sometimes at intervals of three and five feet so that the steep slopes might be measured horizontally.

Men clung to cliffs on which they could hardly find foothold and handled plumb bob and steel chain at every other crawling step, with muscles aching and nerves strained to the breaking point. Men hewed and cut endless rods through vast *chevaux de frise* of down timber; men hung precariously on cliff sides, clinging with one hand while they stretched tape and held the plumb bob steady, dropping downward as much as five feet to measure three horizontally.

A brutal job, yet hardly more brutal than the leveling that must follow. To be sure the transit had to be moved from exact point to exact point on that line, regardless of where it was to stand or where its user was to find room and foothold to stoop and take his sight through the telescope; and many and many a time it seemed that it was a sheer impossibility to find a spot where the steel shod legs of the tripod could find support to hold the limbs level and yet give both backsight and foresight for the continuance of the line.

Many and many a time had Fred laboriously set the instrument up, with legs sprawled grotesquely at impossible angles, with limbs tipped by the leveling screws almost to the limit of movement, while he himself exercised more than the arts of a contortionist to twist and screw himself into a position whence he could get his eye to the telescope and, without touching even with feather lightness the precariously poised instrument, take his sight without a tremor of the muscles to interfere with the delicate manipulation of the tangent screws, and follow by reading, sometimes holding on to a cliff with one hand, the fine variations of the limbs and the finer markings of the vernier.

And though nerves might be strung to breaking point, though every muscle ached and the sense of imminent collapse from weariness was ever present, though the eyes ached from strain and the brain reeled from greater strain, those tiny, almost invisible markings must be set absolutely to a hair's breadth and closer.

AND THE leveling was almost as bad. To be sure, the level did not have to follow the line but must be set up with due regard, not to the straightness of the course but to the elevations. It must find place where height of instru-

ment was not too much nor too little to enable the rod to be read when it was placed on the base line at the point selected. But that meant that the heavy instrument must sometimes be moved over every few feet of ground and placed as carefully as the theodolite itself.

The instrument man had no verniers to read and the rodman could read *his* verniers after lifting the rod, but in essentials the toil and the strain and the brutal perils were the same whether leveling or running the course. Pinpoint accuracy, at every cost of toil and danger, was the essential for the base line, on which the entire survey depended; it must not err within the limits of human ability.

And with it all and adding to the strain went the necessity of caring for the instruments, not because they were expensive—though theodolite and level cost as though made of gold—but because they must be *accurate* and in perfect adjustment or fatal errors would creep into the survey. And "guns," whether transit or level, are delicate instruments which the least rough treatment may put out of adjustment.

There were weeks and months of work on Squaw Creek and the country surrounding it which made up the Quadrangle. Other parties at the other stations were having their weeks and months too, but they were spared Fred's greatest task, which was the running of the base line; for once that base line was run there was no need for another. To be sure, main traverses had to be run from one strategic point to another with transit and level, but they would meander, seeking the easiest ways, and on a meander, be it ever so accurately measured and leveled, there is no such heartbreaking toil as on a straight base line in rough country.

And following those meanders would come the plane table work, sometimes fairly easy, sometimes rough and hard, but with no such terrific strain of absolute accuracy and care and checking and rechecking. For in a map which is to be plotted on a scale of a half-inch to the mile or even an inch to the mile, the details of contour and location could not be shown by the finest draftsman that ever lived within anything less than great limits of toleration. No, the plane table work was child's play after the base line; and the youngsters and student assistants could do most of it.

As a matter of fact that work had been casually put in charge of young Bardelle—and Bardelle was, as the saying went, only in the Survey for his health and the fun he got out of it. To be sure, Bardelle had had an expensive education and his degree was from the Institute itself and that meant that he had had at least the groundwork of a magnificent education. But Bardelle came of a family that was rich and powerful in construction circles, a family of capitalists and financiers who built bridges and tunnels and great dams and who employed the greatest engineers to be found.

Bardelle was destined in the course of time to take his place with that aggregation of power, to be an executive and a builder and planner on a vast scale. He was with the Survey because the Survey was an excellent training school. Any man who survives the exigencies of some of that work is an instrument man of parts, though even so, an instrument man is, at best, hardly more than an apprentice engineer.

That was a thing that rankled with Strong. He didn't dislike Bardelle, for Bardelle was not a man one could dislike. He was a good looking youngster and, despite his social standing, he did not put on airs but was pleasant and cheerful and an excellent camp mate. Strong was not many years older than Bardelle in years, but infinitely older in experience and disappointment. He felt that he ought to be in Bardelle's place; ought to have Bardelle's chances—or certainties, rather, for they were certainties in Bardelle's case. A year or two in the Survey and he would step right on to the ladder that meant fame and success, while Strong toiled on with the Survey or, if his ambition drove him, he would

resign and seek a job with some railroad where he would be a mere instrument man among dozens, doing deadly routine work at a hundred and twenty-five dollars a month.

He would stand no better chance than any other of the thousands of men who could handle transit and level in an acceptable manner. Fate had made of Bardelle a Fortune's favorite while it had left him in the *cul-de-sac* of a bureaucratic job.

And yet he loved his work. He knew that it was a man's job, that it was also no fool's job and that it was an important job. Yet it was not a job that might ever win him recognition. What did the world, even of engineering, know of the obscure toils and heroic deeds of the men of the Survey engaged on the work of making the International Map of the World? Nothing. They were not even names. They would never live in song or story. Their work would go down to posterity on engraved and lithographed sheets and their lives and deeds would be embalmed for future ages in beautifully drawn and cunningly colored maps on which the contour lines and the details of the territory they had mapped would show in intricate patterns of brown and blue and black.

But names and deeds themselves would be entombed on those sheets, buried, obliterated.

And Bardelle—game assistant, pleasant comrade as he was, but, nevertheless, only an assistant good enough to entrust with the direction of the plane table work, the easy, clean up stuff—would go on easily and carelessly to such planning and building as would make his name known to the whole world. And so Fred Strong, who had no family and no influence, nothing but as good an engineering education as had Bardelle himself, envied Bardelle and hated the luck that was Bardelle's.

And he was lonely. There was a spot in him that craved the companionship of a mate. He was a man and he desired a woman. But what woman of the sort he dreamed of would stoop to or consider a man such as he was or must become—rough, toil hardened, rendered crude and weather beaten by the life he led? And he never saw a woman for months upon end.

But Bardelle could and would move among the lovely of the nation and they would love him at his will . . .

CHAPTER II

THE PILGRIMS

THE WAGON was parked on Simon's Flat, which rose a sheer two hundred feet above a branch of Squaw Creek. Half a mile west, taking a direction to the northeast ran the base line, straight as an arrow flight from the Devil's Needle toward Porcupine, marked like a gash by the laboriously cut brush path.

Three miles away towered the Needle, forbidding and grand against the blue sky, tipped now with a golden halo against which its spire showed like a black finger as the sun set behind it. The chill of the evening bit into Fred's bones through his flannels, damp even in that altitude with its rapid evaporation, for his exertions during the day had been strenuous. The bite of fall weather was in the air, but there was at least a month more of toil ahead of him. The base line would probably not be completely measured before the snows of the high peaks would drive them out to another winter's work in the office over the drafting tables.

The camp was a haven of rest and refuge, something more than a home, temporary though it was. It meant the heavenly warmth of the fire, the repletion of food, even such food as Denver George habitually cooked, rough and coarse but aromatic and delicious in the smell of wood smoke and the aroma of the balsams. It meant the ecstasy of soap and cold water on burned, dry and grimy skin. It meant heavenly relaxation and drowsiness, sitting, pipe drawing, before the warming, hypnotic flames, silent among chattering comrades, dreaming

of all those things which were so far removed from him.

There would be trout browned to a crisp, fresh caught in the little stream nearby. There would be venison, for Denver George was a mighty hunter before the Lord and the open season on deer was now three days old.

The country swarmed with game and the streams were alive with trout. Though Fred loved to fish and hunt there was small chance to do either. His Sundays were spent over his notebooks and calculations and the wearisome forms and reports that bureaucratic regulations made obligatory. Only these hours of the evenings were his, in which to withdraw himself from reality and live a more satisfying existence in fire fed dreams.

The fire flickered before him in the fading daylight as he climbed the last steps of the ascent to the rim of the Flat. Its grass covered levels lay there in front of him and its pleasant groves of silvery blue spruce and golden aspen smiled a welcome to him. He was soot blackened and foul, for he had struck a patch of burned over bull pine that day and the charred trunks of fallen trees and the resin soaked knots had coated him with their sticky stains from head to foot.

He was weary, iron thewed as he was, and the weight of the heavy theodilite was a burden to him. His helpers had preceded him with the exuberance of youth and the carelessness of the irresponsible, but he climbed slowly, stolidly, his thoughts brooding and remote.

He came to the wagon and the tents and carefully placed his transit and covered the telescope with its rubber hood against the dews of night. He strode to the rudely hewed bench where Denver George had set out a tin basin of water for him. It looked woefully inadequate for the task of cleansing him.

He retreated to his tent and fetched out a clean shirt, stripping off the resin crusted and soot begrimed one he had been wearing. He came out again stripped to the waist, his white skin and beautifully muscled torso presenting a wonderful contrast to blackened trousers and grimy hands and face. Denver George looked up from the fire over which he squatted at his cooking. The aroma of frying trout and broiling venison smote Fred poignantly.

"Which you-all better step high with this here naked play, boss!" he said. "We-all got visitors today."

"Visitors!" said Fred vaguely and looked around.

None of his own men was to be seen, though they had come in not more than a quarter hour ahead of him. Nor were there any of the signs of soiled men larking over the wash basins, though these had evidently been used in haste as the spilled water and soiled towels showed.

A single rough figure lounged in the twilight a little distance from Denver George and a horse stood tethered to a tree. That was a stranger, Fred thought, probably some cow hand of the region drifting in seeking bed and food and relief from his own society. But cow hands in this section were reputed scarce for good reasons. Squaw Creek was—Squaw Creek. And why should he consider conventions in the face of a rawhide male of the region?

"Oh, not him!" said George, but his voice dropped to a mutter. "There's pilgrims over at the spring in the aspens and when they heard it every flea bitten wolf in the pack riz right up from his wash and pulled his freight to get a sight. Huntin' party of dudes, male and female."

Fred straightened and gazed out through the trees toward the aspen grove referred to, a quarter-mile or less away over the flat. He could see the twinkle of the firelight from the other camp and figures blended with the slender, golden stems of the aspens. It did not seem likely that at that distance his nudity would offend the modesty of women in the other camp.

He was but little interested. He had encountered other hunting parties of dudes and had found them uninteresting, generally soft handed, rather helpless pilgrims of the cities seeking thrill and

adventure by packing into the wilds under the carefully protecting supervision of hired guides. For the moment he did not remember that pilgrims on Squaw Creek were even scarcer than cow punchers and for the same reason. Squaw Creek was dangerous ground for any but its own denizens and they were never numerous.

"Reckon most of them will eat over there and stay till they're run out." Denver George grinned as he set out food for Fred. "They've got wind of a filly over there and the stampede follered. You'd think an old longhorn like Sam Hope and a shellbark like Ike Stone'd have better sense, but they're as eager as them kids from college. The whole b'ilin' hit the high spots as quick as they heard."

"How many?" grunted Fred indifferently.

Hunting pilgrims, male or female, were nothing in his life. Silly fools who thought a surveyor ought to be something romantic and who cackled endless questions smacking of childishness.

"One old shorthorn and his gal and a feller frum Newcastle is guidin' and packin' fer them," explained George. "They travel a heap lighter than any pilgrims I ever saw up this way. They got five pack horses which'd be heavy work fer the wrangler, but from what he tells me the old party is right useful himself in spite of him being dirty with money. Which if it was me I wouldn't welcome no such job whatever. Gals think they always know more about cookin' than any man."

Fred thought some of them probably did know more about it than Denver George, especially when it came to dough, but the trout and venison were such as no man could cavil at and no woman equal, at least in a camp. He was hungry and for a time devoured his food without thought of the pilgrims or of that other stolid and silent figure who still squatted back in the shelter of a spruce. Nor did he for some time give heed to the little wondering and half uneasy thought that struggled in the back of his tired brain. He asked one perfunctory question before he lighted his pipe over his steaming tin cup of coffee.

"Bardelle not in yet?"

"Not yet. Maybe he come thataway and stopped to prance a bit with the filly over there. He'd come over the Flat from thataway if he's been on the Needle."

FRED nodded and a twinge of his old jealousy struck him. He had no use for pilgrims, for the sharp or dull featured women who trooped into the wilds with their men to play at hunting and to get sunburned and roughened as a great adventure. He had never yet seen one who appealed to him. Cream and white and soft, with gentle eyes and sweet voice, was the girl he dreamed about. He had small use for the khaki clad high booted, raw boned or too well fleshed sort that he was likely to encounter. Yet there was Bardelle, and he could picture that young fellow breezing joyously into the neighboring camp and setting himself to entertain that young woman over there without a thought of embarrassment. Fred could not do it. But Bardelle had the blithe, unconscious assurance of his caste; he never doubted that he was welcome—and he always was.

Fred brooded a little over the thought and then, in annoyance at the childishness of it, forced his mind to other things. And that most readily accessible was the presence of the man who sat so stoically and silent in the shadows.

"Who's your friend?" he asked gruffly, with a nod toward the half recumbent figure.

Denver George frowned, his seamed and weather beaten face harboring an expression of anxiety and doubt.

"You can search me," he said shortly. "I don't know and I ain't sure I want to know."

"Huh?" grunted Fred and looked keenly at the cook.

"He blew in this afternoon. Stopped a minute at the camp over yonder and then come on here. Just hung around and is hangin' around yet. He's quite a hand at askin' questions and a hell of a mess at answerin' them. And this place bein' what it is I ain't makin' no issue with him over it."

"Humph!" said Fred.

He looked long into the shadow where, in the deepening dusk, the silent figure of the man showed vaguely against the tree. His tethered horse stamped and flung its head to dislodge a fly and the saddle leather creaked.

"Better come up to the fire, stranger!" Fred said, affably. "Have you had your chuck?"

"Had a plenty, thanks," the stranger answered gruffly.

But he rose slowly and came forward into the firelight, though when he sat down it was where the shadow fell on his face. His wide brimmed, shapeless hat was drawn low over his eyes, but beneath it showed a scrubby, sandy mustache and a stubble of light beard which did not hide the contour of a brutal chin. He wore a checked overall shirt and cracked, worn chaps and his boots were rough and worn, yet somehow he did not look like a cowpuncher in spite of spurs and leather wrist protectors.

There was a broad leather belt at his waist and over it a sagging cartridge belt with full loops. To the stiffer and tighter belt a holster was attached and its lower end was tied down to the man's thigh. There was nothing unusual about all this and yet Fred had an uneasy feeling that the man was not usual. Something sinister seemed to lurk about him.

"Work around here?" asked Fred idly.

The man's blank and shadowed gaze was fixed on him with a queer expression of watchful furtiveness.

"Yeah! Bill Wheeler's ranch," he answered shortly.

He volunteered no further information, yet Fred felt again that uneasy twinge. Bill Wheeler's ranch lay far away and was not much of a ranch, but it had a reputation. Bill Wheeler's activities, his reason for being, were shrouded in mystery. His ranch lay on the Rustler's Trail and Squaw Creek was one of the stations on that vague and sinister highway.

Butch Cassidy and Harry Tracy and the Three Fingered Kid were supposed to ride this way when on business bent. Not more than a month ago a grim and hard faced crew of men led by the sheriff of the county had ridden into these fastnesses and vanished for a time. They were looking for one Pima Joe Strachan who had held up a Union Pacific train, killed an express guard and taken to the Rustler's Trail for refuge.

A week back they had ridden forth again, glum and silent and unsuccessful; and quiet, which had hardly been disturbed, had descended upon Squaw Creek and its environs. But in going they had voiced a half sneering warning. Fred had better keep his eye peeled against Butch and Tracy and the Kid and Pima Joe and any others of that ilk who might be in or about this section of the Trail. Fred had shrugged a shoulder. His job was to be done and all the desperadoes in the West might not stand in the way of its doing.

NOW a feeling of uneasiness was at full tide in him. What were pilgrims doing on Squaw Creek, playing at hunting and mild adventuring? What folly had led an old man and his daughter into this untrodden wilderness where all the riff-raff and scum of the penitentiaries, the cattle thieves and the train robbers and the murderers and the escaped convicts congregated as in a stronghold where the law could not reach them?

To the west, over miles of untrodden and practically unexplored mountain land, lay the wild and forbidden fastnesses of the Ute Reservation. For many leagues to the north stretched the rugged tangle and desert of Bad Lands. East and south were vast forests and mountain ranges, verging fifty miles away on the settlements of law abiding people; but all around them were the unknown and un-

traversed cañons and tangled labyrinths of the Squaw Creek Quadrangle where hunted men hid and lurked and none but hunted men were safe.

He looked again at the man from Bill Wheeler's ranch. He was relieved to see that he had a full complement of fingers on both hands. He was not the Three Fingered Kid, an engaging murderer for whose dead body two States offered a reward. Nor did he show the brutal bulk of Harry Tracy, and certainly he was not the gay and light hearted Butch Cassidy. Would that he were, for Butch at least had redeeming features and was not a killer. He might be Pima Joe or he might be one of any number of smaller fry in the region. But he was evil, with a sly, cruel hardness that was felt rather than seen.

For himself and his men Fred felt no particular fear. The Government was back of them. Even bandits who might hold up the mails would hesitate at hostilities with a Government Survey party right in their own haunts. Violence to them would mean quick and ruthless action, which would sweep their haunts clean of the criminals. And refuges on the Rustler's Trail grew ever more precarious as the years went by and the country became more settled.

But those fool pilgrims. They had horses and supplies which the outlaws coveted and needed and George had said the man was rich, though that was doubtful. Rumor had them all rich. But men like Tracy and Pima Joe would not hesitate to rob and perhaps capture and hold for ransom such prey as this at hand. It was dangerous territory for pilgrims and he must tell them so. He wished Bardelle would come in, for Bardelle would be a better and more convincing delegate than he where city folk were to be influenced.

But Bardelle was not here and the evil looking stranger was looming there, rough, apparently stupid and perhaps cunning, almost certainly brutal. There was nothing of the picturesque about this bandit, if bandit he were. There was not the slightest glamour of the romantic in him, but he was all the more convincing and threatening for that very fact. An intelligent Robin Hood sort of scoundrel would at least have sense enough to let folks alone, but such a man as this was just dull enough of intellect to do some thing violent and deadly and it was pretty nearly certain that no villainy would be beyond him. Murder would be commonplace to that brutal soul.

The man began to talk, or rather, to ask questions.

"You-all are doin' a survey, ain't you?"

"Yes."

"Fer the Government?"

"Yes."

"What fer?"

"To get a map of the country, of course."

"One o' them contower maps? Geological Survey?"

"Exactly."

"Showin' all the creeks and hills and cañons and such?"

"Just that."

"Huh!"

A silence fell and remained for a time. It was broken by another grunt from the man. He rose and stepped with a stealthy furtiveness toward his horse, untied it and mounted. In the saddle he paused a moment.

"I was jest a-thinkin'," he remarked, "that you-all aim to comb and measure this country right thorough makin' that map."

"We'll measure and map every inch of it," said Fred cheerfully.

It rather amused him to realize how uneasy such a prospect must make the denizens of Squaw Creek.

"Waal," drawled the man, "I see. But, pardner, you might recollect that the folks in here don't want no maps and they ain't honin' to have Government sharps know too much about this place. You savvy?"

"I savvy well enough," said Fred. "But the Government has a habit of doing what it wants to do, old-timer, and just now it wants me to map Squaw Creek. And believe me, I'm going to map it. Do you savvy?"

"I reckon so," said the man without any show of feeling. "I was jest remarkin'. So long!"

"*Adios!*" said Fred and the man wheeled and rode off into the dusk.

Fred watched him go, frowning.

"Where the hell is Bardelle?" he complained.

He looked again at the firelight from the camp at the aspen grove. A gust of laughter came from it. Bardelle was probably there. At any rate he must have a word with the pilgrims and give them a warning. Squaw Creek was no place for them. He caught up his coat and strode toward the aspen grove.

CHAPTER III

AN ENGINEER ON HOLIDAY

FRED came upon the camp in the aspen grove. The fire cast a circle of light around on the farther edge of which the ghostly golden stems of the aspens loomed like a fence against a background of blackness. Silhouettes of figures squatted or lolled at the fire. He saw his own men, Ike Stone and Sam Hope, on the outskirts of the crowd, diffident in the presence of a girl from the cities.

They were merely raw men of the backwoods, dependable and intelligent enough, but hired as laborers for the occasion; strong men with ax and rope, trusted occasionally to hold one end of the tape against the pull of the tension scale in more reliable hands.

There were two others there also, Fetters and Jackson, the first a man of early middle age, understudy to himself as instrument man, a stolid, competent, unimaginative fellow with training sufficient for the job but little more; the second a youngster fresh from college, who was long on theory but had to be watched on execution. It was his first year with the Survey and he was an enthusiast.

Of the rest of his men, Bardelle, next to himself the most capable of the lot, with three assistants, one an axman and assistant chainman, a young fellow of the same stamp as Hope and Stone, and the other two students and apprentices like Jackson, were running out a main traverse from the Needle out toward Harmon's Knob along a ridge. The Knob had been selected as site for one of the secondary triangulation stations.

Bardelle should have returned to camp unless he had run his line so unexpectedly far that it was preferable to camp where he was. But he had no camp equipment. At any rate Fred observed that Bardelle and his men had not come here and he again felt a twinge of uneasiness.

There were two tents in the background, small and light affairs equipped against the cold of the early fall nights with conical Sybley stoves. Hobbled horses grazed somewhere out on the flat, the sound from the bell horse arising weirdly from time to time. A litter of ropes and tarpaulins and pack saddles and equipment lay about.

The guide, a weather beaten native in overalls and wristlets and checked shirt, pottered about cleaning up after the meal. On a log near the fire a girl was sitting, her face shadowed by her hat and sprawled at length on the ground was her father, a bulky man whose shoved back hat showed his gray hair and craggy face clear in the firelight.

Fred stepped forth with a brief greeting. Hope and Stone faded farther into the background and lent help to the guide. Fetters and Jackson looked up and made place for him. The man on the ground heaved himself ponderously up to a sitting position and the girl raised her head and looked at him under the shadow of her wide brimmed Stetson. She was breeched and booted and sun browned; far indeed from the cream and gold of his ideal. But he did not think of that at the time—or later.

"Hello, Chief! Glad to see you," said the recumbent hunter from the ground. He spoke heartily, in a sonorous voice, somehow familiar to Strong. "Come over to get neighborly?"

"How do you do?" said the girl, more formally.

Her voice was low and cool and without interest, but her glance seemed to fasten on him and linger as though in curiosity. But just now Fred's interest lay in that voice that he knew and had heard before. He looked keenly at the big man, recalling him from the past with something of thrill. He had given evidence before a committee in Washington two years ago and this man had been there. Such a man as Fred had once hoped to be; a great man and a famous one, a builder and a planner of the first rank, one who was sought for and deferred to by the great of the earth.

This was Henry Updyke himself, great executive, great planner; but greatest of all as an engineer. This was the sort of man under whose banner Strong would have loved to enlist; a chief whom he would have served with adulation. But he was only a topographer in the Geological Survey.

"Mr. Updyke!" he exclaimed and held out a diffident hand.

With a slight frown of puzzlement the great man took it, heartily enough, evidently trying to recall where he had met this young man, sizing up his lean bronzeness. He failed.

"I'm Updyke," he said, "and you're—"

"Fred Strong is my name. You wouldn't know me. I saw you at the hearing on the Shinumo Creek scheme where I gave details on the Gila Meridian survey. You were interested as a consultant on the proposed hydro-electric end of the project. But it fell through."

"I remember," said Updyke. "Weren't you the fellow who ran out the unsurveyed portion of the Meridian in the winter? A dirty job that must have been."

Fred grinned, happy at being even vaguely remembered by this giant among engineers.

"Dirty enough," he said, "but we are used to that. Are you on vacation?"

"Just that," said Updyke emphatically. "My daughter, Mr. Strong."

Fred turned for the introduction. The coincidence was not stretched. It lay merely in meeting a fellow craftsman in this remote region. But why not? Updyke loved hunting and roughing it and his later years saw little enough of adventures since he had become famous and free from routine and actual detail of work. He was the consultant and executive now and, if he chose to leave his desk and office now and then for a fling at sport in this big game country, there was nothing to wonder at in the fact. Nor that he should bring his daughter. Many men brought their daughters and wives into the mountains. But not to Squaw Creek.

The girl had turned her face to him and tilted the brim of her hat to smile her acknowledgment of his bow. No, she was not the girl of his dreams, but those dreams had become nebulous and unreal things from the moment he looked at her. She had a firmly molded, tanned face with a fine, generous mouth and a firm chin. It was an oval face, a smooth face, with candid, gray eyes, neither too pretty nor too plain. She was slim and well knit. Browned she was by the sun, but it had not succeeded in coarsening her skin. She was a pleasing sight to Strong as she had been to his assistants, but the very pleasure she gave him was mixed with uneasiness.

He hardly knew what to do or say. She looked so serene and confident and capable and her father seemed a looming figure of power and self-confidence. Who was he to move these people of a greater world? How would they take any warning from himself? He felt somehow inadequate.

None of them was talkative, the silence that seems appropriate around a campfire at night having descended upon them. Fetters was stolidly taciturn as a rule and contented himself with staring in a sort of bovine satisfaction at the girl. Young Jackson was shy in the presence of his chief. Hope and Stone had faded out of the picture and were in the background exchanging monosyllabic confidences with Updyke's own man. And Updyke seemed content with silence. He was out for a vacation and he was afraid that this meeting might involve a flood of shop talk. He was not desirous of a busman's holiday.

FRED felt that there was desperate need to break the ice, to utter a warning, to influence these people in some way. He did not know why he felt it, but the feeling which had been vague before he saw the girl was now insistent. It had been a duty before and now it was an urge. He almost felt, somewhere out there in the darkness of the silent wilderness, the presence of that lurking figure that had recently left his own camp.

He envisaged that tangled chaos of hills and cañons and timber clad fastnesses which was Squaw Creek and he peopled it in imagination with skulking, sinister figures, the scum of the West and of the East, of the wilds and of the cities, the jailbirds and robbers and killers of half a continent. Exaggeration, perhaps, but exaggeration with a firm basis of fact behind it.

Butch Cassidy, Tracy, the Three Fingered Kid and Pima Joe were no myths, nor was that man who had sat at his fire not an hour ago. And Squaw Creek was a sanctuary which they would defend against invasion. Hitherto he had not worried. He had but to stick to his job and outlaws and their apprehension were no part of it. But now he worried. He looked at Updyke and worried and wondered that a man could bring a daughter into such a place. He looked at the girl and worry grew into anger against the father; that father whom he had always regarded with awe and worship from afar.

"You've just come?" he remarked inadequately.

Updyke nodded.

"Just today, but we're going to stay some time," he said, with a trifle of belligerency in his tone as though he half expected opposition. "I've heard it's a great game country and what we've seen bears that out. It's not hunted out. Over east the mountains are full of tourists. That's why I came."

"You came light, I see," said Fred.

Updyke packed a pipe.

"I always go light," he said. "I don't need a retinue of nurses and neither does Babe there. She's been brought up right. One man to help is aplenty since she and I can pack and cook if we have to. So why carry a caravan?"

"It's not necessary, of course," said Fred. "Still — one man on Squaw Creek—" and he shrugged his shoulders.

But Updyke jeered.

"Squaw Creek!" he snorted. "I've heard more of that Squaw Creek bosh than is welcome, young man. I tell you I'm only glad the myth's widespread, because it's kept others out of here. I don't take a particle of stock in it and if it was all true it wouldn't make a bit of difference to me. Let me tell you, Mr. Strong, I've been in worse places than Squaw Creek and met worse men than these tinhorn cattle thieves and bank robbers and escaped convicts. I don't give a little damn for Squaw Creek and its penny dreadful reputation. All I care about is that it lives up to its reputation as a big game country. I'll attend to any of these imitation bad men that may be lurking around in it."

Fred felt a hot little glow creep up his spine. He could have deferred gladly to the man if he had met him under other circumstances, but with that girl sitting there, smiling, he had a sudden conviction that Updyke, however great as an engineer, was, in one respect at least, a conceited ass.

"You may be able to attend to them," he said shortly. "But how about Miss Updyke? Is she an expert hand at dealing with men like Harry Tracy and Pima Joe? And does she welcome the prospect?"

Miss Updyke merely smiled.

"Are they really so dangerous?" she asked quietly.

Updyke snorted.

"Nothing but a lot of sneaking thugs!" he declared. "They're hiding out, skulking in the hills, crawling and creeping into oblivion. They don't want notice and they won't invite it. This Tracy is an ordinary city gunman and thief; the others are about like him. Probably none of those you've heard of are actually here.

Most of the talk is plain bunk."

"Did your guide think so?" asked Fred dryly.

"He! Of course he thinks so. Knows so, too. The talk and penny dreadful stuff were an excuse for him and the others to boost wages sky high and that's what lies behind it all. I had to pay that fellow twice what he's worth to come here. But he came."

Fred nodded.

"I can't pay my men bonus wages," he said. "Uncle Sam wouldn't stand for it. But I had trouble just the same. Oh, they came. They've worked for me before and the Government behind them means a lot. But they didn't like it and they don't like it now—the natives, I mean. There was a man hanging around my camp this evening. I didn't like his looks—"

"His looks!" jeered Updyke, patronizingly. "What's he look like? Deadwood Dick the demon killer? Alkali Ike, the two-gun assassin? What was he? Some cowboy you've imagined is a desperado?"

"No," said Fred. "He struck me as being—well, a plain and unadorned thug. Maybe he wasn't. I don't know. But young Art Bardelle, my assistant, hasn't come back tonight with his crew and I'd give a whole lot to know that he hasn't run into this fellow and others of his kind."

"Arthur Bardelle?" said the girl with interest. "Is he with you?"

"You know him?"

"Oh, yes." She laughed. "Dad's tied up with his people, I believe. We know them quite well."

Yesterday that would have given Fred a jealous pang, but just now anxiety for Bardelle had killed all his jealousy. He had a lurking, maddening fear upon him and the blatant, self-confident talk of Updyke had stirred it to activity. He rose from his seat on the ground.

"You'd better be turning in, boys," he said to his assistants. "There's work to do tomorrow. Good night, sir! Good night, Miss Updyke."

"Good night, young fellow," replied Updyke, with a tolerant laugh. "Go and get a good sleep and you'll feel better tomorrow."

Fred turned away a little stiffly. He was wondering whether successful men always had their heads a bit turned by it. Updyke had been a heroic name to him, but the real man was not heroic. As a matter of fact he thought him an irritating fool. Yet he was a great engineer. And his daughter—but thought of that daughter made Fred see red. His daughter—on Squaw Creek!

He had taken a few steps, paying no heed to whether his men followed or not. He was beyond the firelight and the level, grass grown meadow of the Flat lay before him and the chill of the mountain night bit into him and made him shiver a little, coming as he did from the warmth of the fire. And then there came a light step beside him and the cool voice of Miss Updyke was speaking.

"Mr. Strong! You said Arthur Bardelle hadn't come back?"

Fred faced her and nodded. She was only a shadow in the dusk, but the trim, slim lines of her stirred him.

"Do you think he's — hurt, or anything?"

"I hope not," said Strong.

That little twinge of jealousy came back. She was anxious about Bardelle, the man of her own world. Would she have been anxious about him, the stranger and unknown surveyor, had he been in Bardelle's place? Conventionally so, perhaps; anxious in word and form but otherwise quite indifferent. But that was not fair and he knew it.

"I'm going to look in the morning," he said. "We'll find him, all right." He spoke with an effort at reassurance.

"I'm sure you will," she replied. "But —would you mind if I went with you? You see, I know his mother."

"No," said Fred. She knew his mother and his whole family, including himself. But—Fred was glad she was to ride with him. He was glad even if what transpired ended in hurting him. "I'll be glad to take you."

"And, Mr. Strong," she added, "don't think we don't appreciate your—interest. Father is a bit cocksure, perhaps, but he doesn't mean anything by it. At any rate I thank you—and I think, perhaps, you're right. Though I'm sure nothing will happen; still it wasn't a brilliant idea to come here."

"I'm afraid not," said Fred. "But we'll all be here too. They won't monkey with Uncle Sam. We'll start early to locate Bardelle if you please."

"Yes," she said. "Good night!"

She held out her hand. He took it diffidently and she turned back. She came up to the fire where her father still lolled, smoking his pipe. He looked up.

"Getting more blood and thunder?" he asked.

She did not reply and he laughed.

"That fellow's a bit cocky, but don't take him seriously. If he amounted to much he wouldn't be pottering with this footling topographical work. A two-bit Government surveyor!"

"He struck me as being rather nice," said his daughter.

"Humph!" retorted Updyke with scorn.

CHAPTER IV

MURDER

IT WAS early when Fred Strong, after a night almost devoid of sleep, bestirred himself to the day's tasks yet, although the thin morning sun of fall had barely started to melt the hoar frost on tarpaulins and bedding, Miss Updyke was not far behind him. He had snatched a breakfast hastily cooked by the sleepy eyed Denver George. He routed out the rest of his men and gave to Fetters, as he awoke yawning, his instructions for the day. He was to take the rest of the crew and chop out the line, setting stakes as far as he could go. When Fred returned he would find so much prepared and ready to go ahead with.

He had hardly finished these instructions and saddled a horse when Miss Updyke, looking cool and fresh, appeared on her own horse, evidently ready for the trip. He had half expected that her father would accompany her, but he was nowhere in evidence and when Fred asked after him the girl told him that he had scoffed at her notion of going and had declined to lose a day's hunting to go on what he called a wild goose chase. Young Bardelle, he said, had merely camped light where night had caught him and would be in when he was ready.

"I hope so," said Fred somewhat grimly when the girl told him this.

"But you don't think so," she suggested.

He frowned and looked at her as she sat waiting on her horse. She had a light rifle in a scabbard on her saddle, but she was otherwise unarmed. He himself was equipped with a serviceable revolver. It struck Fred that both he and her father were delinquent in allowing her to go. If anything had happened to Bardelle, if he had been waylaid, the scene of his misfortune might be dangerous.

"I've concluded that you had better stay home," said Fred abruptly. "No telling what we may find out there."

"I shan't stay home," said the girl with a smile. "If Arthur Bardelle has been hurt he will need both of us."

"I'll take Denver George," said Fred.

George looked a little dubious at the prospect.

"No matter who you take I'm going too," said the girl. "I don't think there is any danger. Even if he—has been attacked, his assailants would not stay around. And perhaps he has only camped out—or been lost."

"A surveyor—lost!" snorted Fred.

He stood there in indecision, and the girl wheeled her horse and rode off toward the point where the ridge Bardelle was traversing joined the Flat. On the ridge the trail would be plain to follow where the axmen had brushed it out. Fred uttered a last order to Fetters and swung into the saddle. After all, the work must go on and, if she insisted on riding on the trail, it were better that she went with him than alone.

The ridge they struck was a high and narrow one which like many another radiated out from Simon's Flat. Steep and deep slopes on either hand plunged down to depths filled with tangle of brush and rocks and spiked with a tangle of down timber where ages of windfall had been at work. But the ridge itself was fairly easy traveling, especially since Bardelle's party had been working on it, for they had slashed out much of the brush and had cut through most of the obstructions, though the trail they had left was so narrow that in most places they had to go in single file. For the first part of it the girl took the lead, but Fred soon urged his horse ahead of hers and thereafter kept it there.

There was little conversation between the two. Fred was shy and anxious and the girl was not the idly prattling sort. She rode easily and well, however, and though Fred kept on at a fast walk she was always right on his heels. This continued for two miles, when the trail dipped down into a cañon, crossed it and swung at an angle toward the top of another long crest of high land. They came here into big spruce timber, open and park-like where the ground, almost level, was carpeted with a brown and springy cushion of needles.

The line ran almost straight here and in the absence of brush was harder to follow since there had been little cutting. But blazes on the trees here and there and an occasional slash in the scattered brush marked the path well enough and they were able to go at good speed for nearly a mile when the line again left the ridge and pitched downward on a long slant over a bare shoulder toward a point where the ridge ran out where a stream evidently had cut a gap.

Below lay a gully, bare of timber on this slope except at the bottom where the thick growth of willows and cottonwoods marked the course of the creek which they could hear brawling and tumbling on its way.

They had gone halfway to the point where the line dipped over the spur ending the ridge. They could see the stakes set ahead of them at intervals and according to Fred's calculation they were about four miles from camp and Bardelle could not have run more than a mile more of the line though he worked very late. If he had left the work and started back for camp he should have made some distance on the way. But he had perhaps camped farther along the traverse. And then he suddenly reined his horse in and stood staring down at the ground.

The hillside was bare and the brown and rocky soil was sparsely overgrown with sage and grass. The loose dirt of the hillside showed prints of feet and the unmistakable holes left by the tripod legs of the transit. But it showed more than that and a cold feeling crept over Fred as he stared at the indefinable black clot of mud spreading there below him. He heard a gasp behind him and sought to wheel his horse across the marks, but it was too late.

"That's blood!" said Miss Updyke sharply.

Fred looked at her and nodded. There was a lump in his throat. Bardelle had been a gay and light hearted camp mate, a fine worker if a trifle inexperienced and careless. Gone now was all trace of envy of Bardelle's luck in life. Gone with Bardelle himself. The lump in his throat dissolved and a hot, rasped feeling succeeded it. A blinding anger filled him. If there had been murder here he would know the perpetrator and seek an accounting from him—or them.

"Do you think he's been killed?" The question came brokenly. Its inconsequence did not strike him. He was staring now at all the traces on the hillside, marking the signs of many feet, not all of which could be those of Bardelle's crew. He tried to read the story and though he was no master of woodcraft, no Indian of romance, his trained powers of observation came to his aid. Two or three men on foot had ascended the slope from the gully to this point. Four or five or six had descended it again. The slope showed where something bulky had been dragged down it.

FRED sat for a long moment, his face stern, and scanned the gulch below and the slopes opposite. There was timber on that side, lodgepole standing thick as grass, sprung up after a fire had swept the area. Useless to search in that thicket, but there might be something in the willows along the stream. There might be ambush laid there too and for that reason he strove to pierce the brush to the secrets beneath. And Miss Updyke sat watching him, pale but composed, striving to read his face in its shadowings of weakness or strength. They were both exposed there on the bare slope, even as Bardelle had been exposed. She wondered if he thought of that.

Fred looked around at her absently. He was not even thinking of her, she thought, and she did not blame him. But she was mistaken. He glanced back and forward and upward, to find no cover and again he looked doubtfully below.

"You've got to get off this hill," he said shortly. "As well there as another place."

He wheeled around her and grasped her bridle at the bit, leading her horse downward. They slid and slipped in the sand and sidled sidewise. She motioned him to release the rein and when he did she was able to proceed to better advantage for both of them. Alongside that scar of something dragged they descended until the willow brush closed on them. And there, with his head lying in the water, they found Bardelle.

He lay sprawled grotesquely, shot through the lungs and dead, his woolen shirt dirty and stained with blood and soil where he had been callously dragged down the hill to be thrown into this spot of temporary concealment. Beside him lay the transit, broken and bent, and the steel tape was tangled in the water, in kinks and knots. There was no ax, but the sighting rod was there, splintered and broken maliciously.

Fred turned to the girl. She was white under the tan of her cheeks, but her eyes looked steadily at him, filled with horror but without trace of fear. He had half expected outcry and hysterics, panic at least, but she showed none.

"How terrible!" she said in a whisper. "His poor mother! How can I tell her?"

"It's murder!" said Fred. His eyes were on the body. "See that! They've taken his gun. He was the only one who wore one. Poor devil! He liked to pop at grouse and rabbits." He gazed again around the scene, noting what he could. "And where are the others?"

Miss Updyke had turned away to hide the tears in her eyes. She was shaken, but she had no intention of showing weakness. Fred felt a cold hardness and strength; he was grim and contained.

"We can't do anything for him—now!" he said. "And there's a trail."

He pointed it out, rather plain in the brush. It slanted through the willows to open and rocky ground across the creek, below the thick stand of lodgepole pine. He urged his horse through the water and the girl followed, both anxious for the moment to leave the pitiful sight of the dead boy.

The trail showed plain enough, winding up through a gap in the timber to a place where horses had stood. There had been three of them here, but the footprints that showed here and there were of more men than three. Hoofprints wound up through the lodgepole where a sand slide had stripped a path, but with them went stumbling, indistinct prints of men on foot.

"They shot him from across here and then held up the others, dragged him to the creek and herded the other boys over here. He was the only one who had a gun and they took it."

"But what have they done with the others?" Miss Updyke asked fearfully.

"I don't know. Probably they have headed them out and told them to keep going. Run them off. That would be their way. They were all youngsters and probably pretty badly shocked and upset. But I don't know."

"And what can we do now?"

"*We*," he said, "are going to get out of

this and back where you belong. Then *you* are going as soon as possible to where you will be safe—out to our crew at Veeder's Peak as a start. The chief is there and he'll send some one out with you. Come along."

She hesitated.

"And leave him here?" she queried.

"We can't do anything for him alone. I'll send men—if I can—to bring him in."

"Take him now," said the girl. "I'll walk."

He nodded but he did not follow her idea to that extent. Instead he hoisted the body to his own horse and then mounted behind it. It was grim and sickening work. But he managed it and with the girl, now pale indeed, following him, he retraced their path up the slopes and to the traverse that had not been run to the end.

Thence they rode as rapidly as they could on the backward trail and as they rode wherever the view opened, Fred scanned the country from every side, seeking with keen and trained observation for signs of danger. They saw no trace of any human being, but when they had ascended the final stage to the long sharp ridge that led back to Simon's Flat Fred drew rein abruptly on a high point where the tangled and beautiful wilderness lay stretched out below them.

A wind stirred their hair. It blew steadily and strong up here, a wind out of the southeast. It was a dry wind, but that was nothing unusual. For weeks on end there had been no rain. For weeks to come there would probably be none—not until the snow fell.

But that perfectly usual and commonplace dryness suddenly took on a new significance to Fred. He was looking out over the cartwheel jumble of cañons and ridges which ran from the Flat in all directions. In most of them was tangle of down timber. On most of the slopes was growth of resinous pine and spruce and slender thickets of lodgepole—all of it dry and inflammable.

As he looked, to south and east, where lay Porcupine and Veeder's Peak, from a cañon here and another there a haze and mist rose and grew and billowed lazily into the air. It blackened and thickened even as he looked at it. He scanned it carefully, marking each separate rising of smoke in the distance. His knowledge of the topography was great, greater perhaps than that of even the denizens of the region. He marked each location with a surveyor's eye, gaging its distance and direction unerringly, as only a surveyor could. And it came upon him suddenly what this all meant.

A little north of east lay Veeder's Peak, and southeast was Porcupine. And in every visible cañon, on every visible slope between those points and them the smoke curled up and billowed in clouds.

"What is the matter now?" asked Miss Updyke with a little catch of the breath as she noted his frowning concentration.

"They've set the hills on fire," he answered steadily. "We'd better be getting back to camp."

CHAPTER V

A RING OF FIRE

IT WAS not yet noon when the girl and Strong returned. The Flat was deserted except for horses which grazed on the tall yellow grass or stood in the shade of the groves. The surveyor's wagon stood with harness hung over the pole and the tent flaps were pulled close. Insects droned in the sun.

There was a peaceful quiet over all the plateau; but that it was a deceitful quiet was brought home to them by the actions of the grazing horses. They had not yet taken alarm, but at intervals they would raise an uneasy head and gaze off into distance, always in the one direction. Pretty soon they showed a tendency, almost unnoticeable except to one who watched closely, to bunch together a little and drift toward the northern confines of the Flat.

Evidently Updyke and his guide had ridden away to hunt. Denver George,

having finished his tasks for the time being, had also departed, seeking either venison or trout. It turned out to be fish when Fred investigated, for he discovered that the cook had left his rifle and taken his fishing tackle. But for the time being he was busy in the gruesome task of removing the body of Bardelle and covering it with a tarpaulin. And Lucille Updyke, unstrung by the morning's events, had taken to her tent. Before she emerged again Fred had to see that the last offices were performed for his friend.

He sought Denver George and fortunately was able to find him without much difficulty. Riding down the slope to the brawling little stream below the Flat, he came upon the cook absorbed in his fishing and broke the news to him. The cook received it with awe and uneasiness. His weather beaten face was serious and anxious as he hurried up the steep climb behind Fred. But for the time being they had no leisure to reflect on what it meant or the consequences to follow. There was a task to be done by the two of them and they set about it.

When they finished, the cook, always calm in the face of unknown dangers, set to work about his fire.

Then they heard the crack of a distant shot from far down in one of the cañons radiating out from the flat. For a moment they both paused and looked soberly at each other, thinking of additional murder. The shot had been heard in another quarter, for the tent in which Lucille was sheltered opened and she came out, pale and with face drawn, but calm and firm. Yet there was fear in her eyes as Fred stepped up beside her.

"Another?" she said with a little catch of the voice.

He was listening intently. All was silence.

"I don't think so," he said doubtfully. "A single shot."

"Where is my father?" She spoke with a dry pain tinging her utterance.

He shook his head, attempting reassurance. The horses, he noted even in that moment, were bunched far to the northern rim of the Flat. Faintly Fred caught a tinge of resinous odor, the scent of burning wood. Helplessly he scanned the level and open ground, covered, except where tree groves dotted it, with grass two feet high and ripe as dry hay. Through the high spears something crept swiftly, the grass waving to mark its progress. It was not more than fifty yards away, but he could not determine what it was until it suddenly leaped the obstruction of a low bush in its path and showed its small body for that instant. It was a creature black as night except for the gleaming white tip of its bushy tail. A fox pelt worth a small fortune! He hardly heeded the fact in the thought generated by its open and steady flight, straight for the northern edge of the flat. He saw it disappear beyond the horses and again dismissed it from his mind as he heard voices and saw the relief that lighted the girl's face.

Over the flat came trotting her father and his guide, talking, the former half angrily, the latter dubiously responding. They came on fast and the engineer dismounted before his daughter, not noting the expression on her face, mingled of gladness and anxiety and sorrow.

"Something's playing hell with the game!" shouted Updyke, as he dropped to the ground and tossed his rifle into his tent. "Its traveling north and clearing out as if it was being driven. I got one shot at a buck down the slope over there, but he was traveling fast and I missed him. If some o' these toughs in here are driving the game out to get rid of us I'll show 'em a thing or two."

He was red and belligerent, unheeding of the expression on his daughter's face. Lucille put out her hand.

"Dad, be still!" she said. "Arthur Bardelle has been killed."

For the moment he stared at her. His jaw dropped and the red faded slowly out of his sanguine countenance. Then he bent a severe eye on Fred.

"What does this mean?" said he. "Art Bardelle killed? How was he killed?"

"Shot," said Fred. "Murdered! We've

buried him—over there." He spoke a little jerkily.

"Murdered?" repeated Updyke. "That's a serious matter. Young Bardelle! His people are mighty prominent folks, young fellow! Murdered?"

"Father!" said Lucille.

"I didn't murder him," said Fred bitterly. "And the prominence of his people won't bring him back."

"Who murdered him then?"

Updyke's guide was staring at them intently, his rather prominent eyes pale and his jaw slack. Fred cast him a fleeting glance. The man was beyond middle age, an old-timer of the neighborhood, yet he was not dependable. A man Updyke had picked up, competent enough as a guide and packer perhaps, but weak and shiftless of his kind and none too strong minded. And now his gray hue showed that the thought of murder frightened him.

"I done told you-all this Squaw Creek wasn't no place to hunt in," he whined.

Fred shrugged his shoulders. He was thinking that there was something obstinately futile about Updyke, great though his reputation was. Something of the windbag and the sounding drum. Who had murdered Bardelle? How did he know? Who, indeed?

LUCILLE saved him explanation. She spoke low, clearly, with a firm gravity that held her father. His face was turned to her and his rather bulging eyes were intent on her pale and sober face. When she had finished he broke out again, confident, overbearing, commanding.

"Well, if that's what's going on here," he roared, "the answer is easy. We'll get going out of here, young woman, and as soon as you're out of harm's way we'll see what's to be done to Squaw Creek. If I don't have a posse in here to clean up these ruffians before I'm many hours older my name's not Updyke! These tinhorn desperadoes have made a mistake when they pull their stuff where I am. Now, young man, we'll just get busy here. You've buried him, you say? Yes, I suppose you'd have to do that. Now you'd better send out and get your men back in here while I—"

Fred broke in on him. The man had an obsession of his own importance, yet his fussy bombast seemed to hide a real anxiety. His daughter was looking at him as though puzzled.

"My men," said Fred, "are out on the line—those not missing. I think the crew with Bardelle has been run out of the country by the men who murdered him. I've no one to send but Denver George, and I'm not sure they ought to be sent for. They'll come in anyhow if they can. In the meantime there are other things to attend to."

"Look here, young man," said Updyke, overmasteringly. "There's only one thing to attend to right now and that's the matter of getting my daughter safely out of this country. You do what I tell you and never mind anything else. You get your men in here and we'll get a move on us. I'll take care of your boss or any one likely to ask about it."

"I'm sorry," said Fred coldly. "I happen to be responsible for my party and work up here and I can't surrender the responsibility to you. I've no control over you or your daughter, of course."

"What's that?" Updyke shouted. "Why, you young squirt, d'you know who I am? Now, now; don't be foolish and go off half cocked. I was running bigger things than this when you were a yearling. You just come to your senses and let me run things. Where's your man? I'll give him his orders."

"You'll give him no orders that he'll heed," said Fred. "Why, man, stop and think a minute. Do you know this country at all? You're an engineer and surveyor yourself and you must realize something of what it is. And you've seen the game running all in one direction lately, though it apparently hasn't struck you why. I tell you the whole range is on fire beyond us. These Squaw Creek toughs aren't stopping at a single murder. They're out to chase us all, and Lord only

knows if they haven't gone even further with us. What do you intend to do—go barging out on the back trail with your daughter and run into a circle of fire?"

"What's that?" growled Updyke. "Fire! Who says there's fire?"

"I say it," said Fred. "There's a ring of fires all around the east and south, set by some one. Deliberately."

Updyke paled. But he retained his bluster.

"It sounds fishy," he said sneeringly. "You're bluffed, young man."

"I saw the smoke, too, dad," said Lucille quietly.

"Smoke! Smoke! What's a little smoke mean? All nonsense! D'you think these outlaws would burn over their own cover just to chase us out? Anyway, we're safe enough up here. No fire would reach this flat—not enough timber here to burn much. Now, to get back to the subject—you be reasonable, Strong, and I'll see you don't suffer by it."

"I'm perfectly reasonable," said Fred. "Reason tells me that fire might not run over the Flat, though the grass is pretty dry and high, but it will run through every slope around us and this place will be suffocating with smoke for days maybe. You couldn't live on it unless the wind changes and drives it the other way."

"But we're going to get out anyhow!" roared Updyke angrily. "If you'll get a move on and get your men in."

Fred turned away.

"You talk like a fool!" he said bluntly.

He strode away and, even as he turned his back on the two, he was bitterly conscious that another tiny dream, barely fledged and unacknowledged, a dream engendered by steady eyes and soft voice, had ended in a sour awakening. That was a girl in a thousand—and he had clashed with her, he, the insignificant surveyor.

But Updyke was an ass without an idea of what he was up against; a blatant egotist, traveling on his reputation and a front; his sole idea was to pack and run on the back trail, the only trail he knew, whether he ran headlong into the ring of death that surrounded them or not. And Fred was already sick with apprehension for the remaining men who had gone out all unknowing toward that danger.

HE STRODE toward his tent with a sharp word or two to George, who was busy with the cooking fire. He stepped into his tent and stood a moment examining the equipment still left to him. The big level stood there and its telescope was powerful, but it had no compass or angularly spaced limbs. His own transit was with Fetters and the other had been destroyed by the murderers of Bardelle. But there was a supplementary instrument for occasional use where the accuracy of the bigger instruments was not required. There were two compasses with sights, good instruments both; and there was a little explorer's transit, weighing about ten pounds. He selected this last with its light tripod and hastily slung it to his shoulder and stepped out.

"Snatch a bite before you go, boss," said Denver George.

He held out a plate of food. Fred ate hastily.

"I'm going on to the Needle, George," he said. "You get the horses in and saddle up. I think you'll have to leave the wagon, but you have three pack saddles. Put them on the team horses and one on Bardelle's horse. Pack grub and blankets and leave the other stuff. We'll have to make a run for it. The woods are on fire."

"Hell!" said George. "You don't say?"

Fred mounted his own horse, the little transit an awkward burden. But time was short and he could not afford to walk. He spurred the horse out across the flat and down into the trail to the Needle. George, gazing after him for a moment, soon turned methodically to the work Strong had ordered. After a time the girl came over from her own camp and stood a moment, noting closely the rapid but unhurried preparations to break camp.

"Is Mr. Strong leaving, George?" she asked at length. The weather beaten cook paused a moment.

"It kind of strikes me that way," he said, "but maybe he's only shifting camp."

"But we ought to leave," she persisted. "Surely you know what the danger is."

"Ma'am," said George, "I reckon I know, but it don't make much difference. Strong, he's the lad around here that gives orders and I'm only the one that minds 'em. If he says go, we r'ar up and git. If he says stay, we stay till hell freezes. That's all I know about it."

"But my father is getting ready to go," she insisted. "Surely he knows, too."

"Maybe so," said George. But, ma'am—" and he hesitated—"if I was you—while it ain't no affair of mine—I'd stick as close as a burr to Fred Strong."

"Where is Mr. Strong now?"

"He took the little shooter up on the Needle, miss. Leastways that's where he said he was going. He'll be back soon. He wouldn't 'a' told me to git ready if he wasn't going to move."

"We're going out by the trail," she said doubtfully. "Dad is getting ready. We'll move in the morning early."

She turned and looked southward and east, attracted by the glance George flung in that direction. A black and lowering cloud arose in that direction and she was conscious of a wind blowing now steadily and on its wings drifted unmistakably the acrid smell of burning, resinous wood. The horses which George had tethered to trees nearby tossed their heads uneasily and snorted.

Lowering her gaze, the girl started to see a huge bear slipping in clumsy, flowing motion across the flat. It paid not the slightest heed to the tents or humans, but trotted steadily on toward the rim and vanished. A moment later her father strode over to them.

"Look here, my man!" he said authoritatively to George, who was again busy sorting his packs. "What is this fellow Strong going to do? He might as well know it—I'm going to pack and go tomorrow morning, out on the trail. He can come or stay as suits him, but if he comes he can just cut out his shirty ways. I'm boss where I travel."

"Well, I'll tell Strong when he comes," said George.

"But what's he aiming to do? You know, don't you?"

"I don't and I don't keer," said George. "Long as he knows, I'm satisfied. But if you're aiming to pull your freight tomorrow if I was you I'd round up them hosses right now. The smoke's driftin' in and there's no tellin' where you'll have to look fer them tomorrow. They'll head right away from the fire and keep goin'."

"Well, there's something in that," said Updyke graciously. "I'll send that man for them. I'd thought of it myself, of course."

Lucille had an uneasy feeling that he had not thought of it, but she said nothing. She had always regarded her father as a sort of superman, competent to meet all emergencies. She had heard oft told tales of his prowess in all sorts of dangers. It had never occurred to her before to doubt either his courage or his judgment. Yet now she was uneasy—traitorously so.

She was thinking of Fred Strong and wondering why he should be pottering about up on a mountain peak when perils encompassed them. She resented that as a callous show of disregard for their safety—her safety. In an incredibly short time she had grown to feel that he was something strong and sure and steadfast. She saw him again as the grief hardened in his face over the body of young Bardelle and felt in him the grim determination that showed through his return ride with her. Not once had he seemed anything but firm and cool.

She looked after her father, listening while he shouted loudly for Pete, their guide, thinking she had better return to him. But she sat down where she was, her chin in her hand, and watched George as he went calmly on with his preparations. She saw Pete mount and ride away toward the rim of the Flat. George broke off his work long enough to get her some lunch.

An hour passed, and two of them. Her

father came once or twice to stride around and utter angry criticisms of the slowness of everybody. Pete had not returned with the horses and he began to grow angry. His own horse and Lucille's were still tied up at the camp. He stamped and swore and damned Pete for his slowness. And at last Fred rode back, his face grim and set.

"You can't get out on the trail," he said abruptly to Updyke. "There's a ring of fire ten miles across burning over it."

CHAPTER VI

IN THE CAÑONS

"WHAT'S that you say?" growled Updyke, and Lucille winced at the bullying tone while at the same time a feeling of panic struck her.

Fire all around. The black pall of it hung unmistakably against the sky. A fearless deer strode on to the flat and behind him came a dozen does and fawns. Rabbits raced across the grass, all bent in the one direction, Another bear heaved himself over a rise and trotted off. There was as yet no crowd of fleeing animals, no striking sign of panic among those of the thin stream that came and passed; but their singleness of purpose and steady, heedless progress were significant.

"I say you're cut off to the east," said Fred. "The fire's out all over the hills and burning this way. You've got to move and move right now."

"Move! Move where?" Updyke roared as though to hold Fred to blame.

"See here, Mr. Updyke," said Fred. "I know this country and you don't. "I don't know whether I can get you out, but I can try. I've been working in it two years now. You get your horses up and throw on what packs you can in the next hour. I've got to wait until the last minute against my men coming in, though I think they are cut off. You've got an hour."

"Hell!" roared Updyke angrily. "I sent Pete for the horses more than an hour ago and he hasn't come in. I'm not asleep."

"Seems to me you are!" snarled Fred. "An hour ago and a ten minute ride to the rim. Where'd you get this Pete?"

"Down at Newcastle. He's no good, but he knew the country in here, which no one else would admit knowing."

"And how did he know it? He looked jailbird all over to me and he probably was if he knew Squaw Creek. He's a loss."

Fred was off at a gallop with a shouted word to George. They saw him vanish toward the north rim and George set to work again assembling his neatly arranged packs. But he did not yet sling them on the saddles and begin the lashing.

"Looks like your scout had vamoosed," said he to Lucille. "Probably got friends in this section since he knows his way about. If he ain't taken the hosses, it may be all right."

But twenty minutes later Fred galloped in again, his face gloomy, and dropped to the ground without a word. Updyke, roaming around and cursing the absent Pete and all the fates, wanted to know what this Government surveyor thought he was up to and whether he had any rational idea of a way out of their predicament.

"They're gone," said Fred curtly and impatiently.

He glanced at his watch. A fleeting look took in the girl, sitting silent and patient near her cursing, blustering parent. The glance wandered to the tents in the aspen grove.

"Miss Updyke—" Strong ignored her father—"go over and get blankets, sleeping bags, absolute necessities; no more than you must have. You've got to travel light. Don't forget water bags if you have them. George, dump most of those packs and sling one horse with food, another with bedding. Take one of these compasses and I'll take the other. Step into it now."

George stepped and Fred stepped with him. Updyke tried to give advice and instruction, and was ignored. He went after Lucille, who was dragging from the tents the stuff Fred had ordered. She

slung them on her horse and brought them over. Updyke came behind with a lot of pharaphernalia which Fred fell upon and sorted out. Guns, fishing tackle, ammunition; he threw all aside but a light rifle for the girl and one for her father, with a belt of ammunition apiece.

George's fishing tackle, however, was packed. George's rifle went too. They were about to turn the two or three horses which were not used loose when they heard a sound, and over the brow of the slope there came a tired, staggering ghost of a man, blackened by soot and smoke, hoarse from thirst and suffering, glaring at them through inflamed eyes. Fred sprang toward him and supported him to the camp.

"Fetters! My God, man, where are the rest?"

Fetters reached for water and gulped it down. He choked and blinked at them all as he gasped:

"Fire cut us off. Never knew it was behind us until too late. Sent the rest on to Porcupine. They could get through all right. Open ahead of them when they left. I came back."

"But, man, why didn't you get out too?"

Fetters soused his begrimed face with water and snorted. His blackened and wan features, drawn and haggard, lighted with a slow grin.

"You was back here, Boss, and I thought maybe you'd want help. And this was our job, wasn't it?"

"But you must have come through it. What a damn fool you were!"

"I circled it, Boss, as well as I could. It was some job. But I got around most of it, though it was a near go. It's all across the Porcupine trail and creeping south and west, coming pretty fast. I knew you'd stick with the pilgrims here and I guessed you'd maybe need help with the lady. I sent out the gun and stuff with the boys, so they're all safe, and then I came back."

"And I'm damned glad to have you, Fetters," said Fred and slapped the older man on the back. "Rest up and eat. You'll need it, for we're going to move *poco tiempo*."

"And I'll say you'd better," said Fetters with a grunt as he reached for food.

Lucille stared at him, wondering at the man. She had thought him stolid, a nonentity, a routine surveyor without brains or ambition, content to drone along at his specialty, without initiative. Yet out of a sheer loyalty that held her breathless he had turned back from safety and plunged into that hell to stand beside the chief in his time of need. Even Updyke was silent and looked gapingly at the man as though sensing some of the heroism in him.

Fetters spoke.

"Where's Bardelle?"

They told him and his face went grim as he listened. But when he had heard he said:

"Hell! I wish I could lay hands on the toughs that did it! He was a good kid!"

It seemed to Lucille that his advent rendered it out of the question for them to move. It was three o'clock in the afternoon and there would be no more than four hours of daylight left to them. The man was worn out, exhausted. He must at least rest the night. But neither he nor Fred even considered it. The packs were slung, Bardelle's horse was saddled again for Fetters, and almost before she realized it they were mounted and moving. For the time being her father had fallen silent and acquiescent, the sight of Fetter's features and clothes having brought home to him some of the realities they faced.

THEY plunged down from the flat into the steep fastness of the creek below. Here the wind did not blow so steadily and the cool depths seemed damp and refreshing without the acrid smell of smoke, though up above them they could see the drifting haze that turned the hitherto blue sky into a gray and threatening canopy. They turned downstream at the bottom of the cañon and wound and twisted their way over the rocks and through the tangle of brush and fallen logs, making slow and painful progress in

spite of feverish work on the part of Fred and his two assistants.

Neither surveyor was a crack herdsman and it was fortunate for the party that Denver George was. The horses plunged and snorted, evidently loath to be driven in this direction, which seemed to the girl to be right toward the fire swept areas. But Fred held on for a mile when the ridge on the right of them broke and another steep gully showed coming into it at an angle. Up this they turned and began a hectic and feverish climb over a slope so covered with gray and overthrown trunks of slender trees that it seemed impassable. They had axes with them and Fred and Fetters, in spite of the latter's condition, dismounted while George led their horses.

They hacked and hewed their way through the down timber and George drove the horses through the path they made. But the slope was high and steep and the tree trunks lay thick upon it. Fetters gasped and sobbed as he swung his ax and Fred, with only an occasional appraising look at his friend, hewed and cut away with grim yet cool energy.

Once or twice he glanced at Updyke, who sat on his horse and gave directions which went unheeded. Lucille felt a hot desire to dismount and relieve the sweating, laboring men. She wanted to run and wrest the ax from Fetters' tiring hands and chop away at the deadly fence with all her feeble strength. The man almost staggered as he worked and once or twice the ax slipped and flew out of his grasp. But he retrieved it and fell to again, the soot on arms and face streaking and running with the sweat of his labors.

Over them now blew the wind and on it came the smell of burning wood. The sky grew dark above them.

"Stick to it, old man!" cried Fred. "We'll make it yet."

Fetters looked up, gasping. He shook his fist at the sky. His legs were trembling with exhaustion.

"By God, we will!" he croaked and then his red eyes swept to Updyke, leaning from his saddle and urging them on. "Hell's bells!" he suddenly bellowed. "Get offa that horse and help! You four-flushing tinhorn!"

Fred's eyes swept around to those of Updyke. The big engineer was gasping like a fish, his face flaming. There was a sneer on Fred's lips. He said nothing, but his ax swept up and fell and he leaped on and upward to hew again at another obstacle. Fetters began to sob, as much in rage as despair. But his shoulders sagged as he tried to lift his ax. Lucille was down now and at her father's side.

"Down! Down and help!" she screamed. He gaped at her.

"But why don't George—"

"Damn George! Oh, you flabby coward! Can't you help?"

She sprung to Fetters' side, took his ax and was hacking futilely at the tough and stubborn timber. Ahead, Fred looked around an instant and called to her.

"That's the lady! You're a jewel, Babe!" She felt a glow at hearing her father's pet name for her on his lips.

Shamefaced, her father was down and wresting the ax from her hand. He was big and powerful and as he swung it his anger came to the fore and he hewed and slashed with the fury of a madman. He was a good axman too, and the logs gave under his assault.

Imperturbable and cool, Denver George herded the horses skilfully through the gaps. She fell back and helped Fetters to mount his horse and rode beside him as they went on up. A feathery bit of ash drifted down and rested on her face. She brushed it off and did not know that it left a streak of grime where it had lain. The smell of smoke was strong now.

But Fred was above the down timber and urging them on. Her father strode to his horse, Denver George headed Fred's to his side and they were all scrambling on the last open slope to the top of the great ridge. It was open and bare, rough with rocks but passable. Fred stopped to glance back down the ridge. She looked too, amazed. Had they been riding right into the fire? What folly had led them here?

The ridge swept on and dropped below them and on the sides of it flame shot through murky clouds of smoke. The low roar of the fire, like a thunderous, murmuring torrent, filled her ears. Then Fred was plunging downward on the other side of the ridge and they were dropping into another cañon, far down, filled with the crackling flames of the fire sweeping through the tops of countless trees.

Straight down they went now through tall, somewhat scattered pines, over ground steep and slippery with matted needles. The horses, terrified, were snorting and panting and showing a disposition to swerve and run away from the fire. Heat drifted in surges and waves around them and smoke swept down and around, choking them. But down and across the cañon they went, through a tiny, splashing brook and up once more to ascend a ridge even higher than that they had just surmounted.

But there was no fatal entangling down timber here. They dashed through spruce, the branches lashing them, and George's whoops to his horses were almost exultant. Fetters rode drunkenly and Lucille ranged beside him, helping him stay in his saddle. Ahead Fred swept on in a mist of smoke and fog. He gained the crest, wheeled and stopped. She spurred to come up with him. He grinned at her cheerfully and waved a hand.

"Quite a sight!" he yelled as though she were deaf.

She tried to smile back at him, but wonder and doubt were holding her. She followed his motioning gesture and looked abroad.

They were on a towering, bare ridge running for miles, it seemed. Below them they saw other ridges, two of them familiar from this view. The cañon below the flat through which they had won their way not more than an hour or two before, lay like a wrinkle in the chaos of ridges and cañons and timbered slopes. Behind it the rim of the flat rose and they saw the regular even slopes that led up to it, scalloping it like a shell at this distance. Those scallops marked the heads of cañons. And in the scallops smoke curled and whirled and red, murky lights crept up and spread like questing snakes up and on to the rim of the flat.

And then the grass must have caught fire. She could see a tiny, thin line of red sweeping like an inexorable marching army ahead of the black and streaked billows of smoke that marked the timber fire.

And nearer still, below them, where they had fought their perilous and desperate way through the cañon filled by the windfall something terrible, immense, driven by the gales of hell, swept and roared and reared its red tongues to the skies. It swept through that dry tinder box and raged and crackled where so short a time ago they had cut their way.

And then, far along the ridge, smoke whirled and crept and settled like a blanket. The fire had flung itself again across their path.

CHAPTER VII

ONWARD . . .

WHERE they sat on their winded and uneasy horses they were as yet clear of the fire. The wind blowing over them, now almost with the force of a gale, was quartering. Though it was bitter with the smell of smoke it was not heated, but cool and refreshing to the worn men. Behind them the sun was like a crimson balloon in a haze of purple, sinking low toward the mountain ranges that piled up, dark and inscrutable, as far as they could see.

During the flight and struggle they had seen few signs of life, the game of the region apparently having fled ahead of them. But now, sitting there on blowing horses, they observed here a deer, there a fox or wolf or bear or smaller animal, not many in number but every one flying at his best speed with every evidence of terror.

Fetters was in the worst condition; George and Lucille in the best. The cook had had a strenuous time, but in actual

physical effort he had by no means exhausted himself. Coolly and skilfully he had herded the terrified horses and driven them against their will into what had seemed the very teeth of the fire. Even now his horse was constantly moving, weaving here and there under his guiding rein and voice as he bunched the tired and frightened animals and held them fast.

Updyke was inclined to resent the fact that George had sat on horseback while he himself had almost been dragged from the saddle to wield the ax in that terrible struggle through the down timber. His chief characteristic was self-complacency, born of years of success and authority, and fortified perhaps by some secret, buried realization that his successes might have been largely fortuitous and his authority a matter of luck.

In any case, he was now relegated to a subordinate position, something he was unused to. It worried and frightened him and he felt the necessity strong upon him to reassert himself, to maintain his authority by every means possible.

He felt that his daughter, in whose adoration he had basked so complacently, was seeing her idol shattered and he was impelled to strive, even to the verge of folly, to resurrect that image in her sight.

He had his qualities. Of physical courage he had plenty. It was a bull headed courage which rather refused to recognize peril or, admitting it, minimized it rather than the courage which looks steadfast and open eyed on danger. He had energy and strength, though both were likely to be misdirected. But in his conceit there was at present no room for generosity.

Lucille was considering Fred Strong with candid, wondering eyes, striving to grasp the gallantry and coolness with which he was meeting crises that were almost insurmountable. And her father, who had once seemed to her all that Strong now was, was blundering and blustering in an attempt again to overthrow that dominating force and hoist himself into its place. Lucille herself wondered as they sat, Fetters and George seeming indifferent, while far down the ridge that blast of fire and flame swept out and wrapped the barren crest in a pall of infernal flames.

Leaping the barrier of the bare height, seizing upon the timber clothing the farther slope, the fire swirled upward and onward in new fury and strength. It was creeping toward them too, now on both slopes of the ridge, creeping slowly, slyly and confidently, while it flung far outward on the flank its leaping tongues of spreading destruction.

Fred sat apparently unmoved. The horses stamped and fidgeted and wheeled, bits cutting them as they forced them to stand.

The flames reached the bottom of the gully to their right and, with a sudden burst of speed on the upslope, raced on and over the top of the next ridge. The fire was again outflanking them with terrific speed while it also crept down on them from the front.

Yet for a few minutes Fred sat and watched and did nothing.

All this region was an open book to him. The previous year he had tramped it and traversed it in the preparatory work of reconnaissance. He had a picture of it in his mind's eye that was as vivid as any map. But he knew how serious the situation was, for that very reason. Whoever had set these fires had done so with care and a diabolical skill, taking advantage perhaps of a knowledge as good as his own.

A belt of raging flame cut them off from any hope of succor, miles in width, spreading with every hour and every minute, closing in on them in a vast semicircle.

And there was no hope of help, no possibility that forest rangers and settlers mobilizing rapidly would be battling somewhere on flanks and front to stay and turn the flames. For this was Squaw Creek and in Squaw Creek there were no forest rangers at all and the settlers were dubious and scarce creatures of sinister reputation and black character.

UPDYKE'S booming voice broke belligerently on the silence which had been holding them. It rose above the drone of roaring but still distant flames and the whine of the wind. That wind had suddenly grown warm instead of cool and the smell of smoke and the drift of ash was heavier now. The horses were rearing against the bits and snorting, the pack animals huddling confusedly and sidling in a bunch against the barrier of George's wheeling horse and whirling rope end.

"This is not getting us anywhere!" roared Updyke. "You may be a good surveyor, young man, but as a guide you're not a shine. Come on, you men. It's obvious what has to be done.'

George paid no heed. He was busy with the horses, too busy by far to argue matters. Fetters sagged in his saddle, seizing every moment of quiet to recuperate his forces. He merely looked dully at Updyke. Fred turned and looked at the man, his eyes blank and quiet.

"What is obvious?" he asked.

There was a bite in his tone that enraged Updyke.

"This is obvious!" he yelled as he waved his hand in the direction of the galloping fire. "We can't get through in front, so it's obvious that we've got to run for it and keep ahead. We've got to go west toward the high ranges ahead of the fire. We can stay there until it burns out or the wind changes. It's a thing a blind man could see."

"But not being blind I don't see it," said Fred quietly. "We've rested long enough. Fetters, are you all right?"

"Fine, Boss!" said Fetters, though it was plain that he was not.

"George, can you hold 'em?"

"I can damn well try," said George through his teeth.

Fred cast a last look at the enormous crimson ball that was the sun, sinking low against the western wall of mountains. He seized Lucille's bridle and dragged her reluctant horse around. Spurring his own mount, he trotted across the ridge, heedless of rocks and obstacles, gouging the horses on unmercifully. They reached the slope and plunged down, now at almost a run, the horses panting and snorting and plunging in great jolting leaps.

Fetters was behind with George and the two of them were shouting hoarsely and lashing at the terrified pack animals. One of them managed to avoid the pursuit and scramble back to the ridge and they saw a vanishing glimpse of him as he wheeled and fled at a panic run along the crest of the divide. Then they were down and crashing downward through trees and brush, over rocks and ledges, slipping, sliding, leaping recklessly.

Jolted and half blinded by thrashing boughs, Lucille still saw that steady, brown hand gripping her bridle and dragging her horse on that whirling descent. Behind her her father yelled and swore and objected until the necessity to attend to keeping his seat finally silenced all but oaths. They were hurtling down like an avalanche and like an avalanche they plunged at last to rocky, tangled depths where water ran again and where willows and cottonwood lashed at them and clutched them and cut them.

They were through this in splashing panic and motion abruptly reversed itself as they headed once more against the ascent. Oh, for an hour of level going! But there was no level course here. Rounded, bull backed, rose the next ascent, towering but even, clustered all over with aspen glowing like gold, leaves whispering and shivering as though in terror.

Through the little trees they crashed, horses moaning and complaining with starting eyes and laboring lungs. Saddles were slipping back on sweating, lathered rumps. The horses climbed in great convulsive jumps, doubling themselves fantastically and the high cantles of the saddles thumped them. Smoke whirled and curled down on them.

They came at last to the top and there at last stretched a flat area, tree clad, gently sloping, soft underfoot. The forest was ranked with open aisles and little undergrowth, but the trunks of the trees

bent and swayed with the moaning, sinister gale that swept the tops. And down, sifting down, came ash and soot and acrid smell of burning resin.

Like the wind they fled through the glades, lashing and spurring the half mad horses, Fred ever leaning beside Lucille and guiding her beast with steady hand. She knew that she could not have controlled the animal without his help, but she wondered even then how he managed in the stress to think of that fact. It appeared to her that panic had them all in its grasp and that the wild flight must be governed by the instinct of each to save himself at any expense. She was conscious of a blind fear but also of a hope that somehow, in some way, they might win through.

Above and around them was a shrill moaning sound and the treetops bent and swished and the hot blasts swirled and surged in upon them and the smoke choked and bit at throat and mouth and eyes. Like a swooping wing of some gigantic bird shadows fell and blanketed them, shadows cut by a wavering stream of red that looked like a phantom, bloody sword.

She heard dimly the crash of horses against trees and brush, the thudding of hoofs. Sounds of swearing men and snorting horses prattled against a wall of sound that was a thunderous, triumphant shriek straight from the depths of hell. Heat came, insufferable but almost unmarked, because it was but one of countless tortures.

DARKNESS settled, marked but unlightened by dull and dirty glows of red against a sky that was a pall of smoke. Still they labored on, horses now running convulsively on the last reserves of strength and terror. Another pack horse, though she did not know it, had broken away and was now plunging blindly into the unknown. They themselves were riding like driven fiends across the very front of the fire. How many miles did it stretch ahead of them? How many rushing tongues of flame was it flinging out in its insistent, deadly effort to encircle them and bear them down?

"Keep a-coming, Babe!"

The shout was clear, ringing, almost exultant. She came out of the stupor of pain and despair with a gasp to see Fred's face bending there before her, his hand gripping her bridle rein, his blackened face and reddened eyes lighted up with a grin. He could smile. It was not then hopeless and she could cling to life for awhile. If he could smile—

"Will we get through?" she gasped. Her voice was choked and hoarse.

"We'll damn well bust trying!" he replied.

But they were riding in murk so thick that she could hardly see him and the horse was running stiff, in jerky leaps that told, with its groaning breath, how near it was to its end. She knew that they would not win out; knew it with a conviction that was utterly unlike the panic that had enveloped her before. She tried to smile at Fred, but her lips were caked and split and refused to curl.

"What's the difference? We'll keep on until we drop," she said.

Drop they must, it seemed. Yet drop they did not. The horses labored on blindly; the blackness dropped on them and surrounded them. They could no longer see one another but they clung together by sound when sight failed them. No longer did the tree trunks beat against them and bruise them though they did not realize this for some time. They were still running free down some long, gentle slope and the rustle of grass under the hoofs mingled with other sounds that had changed in quality. The wind still blew, hot and acrid, and the smoke pall was all around them, but not now so deadly and choking. Through it dim figures like monstrous imaginings loomed nearby. Fred's voice came, hailing the others.

"All there?" he called.

"I'm here!" That was Fetters, choked and gasping.

"Me too!" And that was Denver George.

A burst of profanity modified in force by fear and weariness told that her father was also with them. The horses were staggering wearily and drunkenly. How many hours had they toiled and run? And where was the flame that had enveloped them? Where were they? Was it possible to know?

A horse went down with a crash and a yell of rage and terror that told whose it was. With a convulsive exercise of strength Lucille dragged at her rein and pulled her foundered horse to a stop. Fred's hand had dropped from her bridle and he had vanished in the smoke and darkness, but she heard him call out to the others.

"It's all right! I'll attend to him! Go on, Fetters; down to the creek below and wait. If we're not there in twenty minutes head over the next divide to the bad lands and Lost Lake. You can make it."

"I'll stay with you, Chief," came Fetters' steady voice.

"Don't be a fool! You've got to look after the girl!"

"Right, Chief! Where is she?"

"She's there somewhere! I've just left her. Lucille! Miss Updyke!" He was calling and she, groping through the murk, was almost upon him where he stood dismounted.

"I'm here," she said. "Where is father?"

"I've got him safe. Go with Fetters."

That her father was there she could tell by the cursing that came from below her. She dropped to the ground. The horse was too weary even to try to break away. The air seemed clearer somehow and the breeze not so hot and acrid with smoke. Yet they moved in it like gnomes of some infernal region.

"He's not hurt," said Fred. "You go with Fetters."

She heard Fetters and George calling nearby. But she stooped to her father. He was pinned by one leg under his horse which had fallen with him.

"This is a hell of a note!" he complained. "Running us right into it. If we'd taken to the mountains like I said—"

"You'd have struck a wall of timbered slopes you couldn't climb," said Fred, "with the fire closing in on you faster than you could travel ahead of it. Lost Lake's our chance and we've almost made it. Can you walk?"

He had dragged the horse half up, enough to release Updyke. He rolled out and rose, bruised but able to stand. Fred passed a grimy hand over his forehead in a gesture infinitely weary. It brought home to Lucille how tired they all were, almost spent, in fact. How much farther could they go?

"Go with Fetters!" Fred was saying, waving her away.

Fetters was calling again. He loomed up through the murk, dimly gigantic.

"Can't locate her, Chief," he complained.

"I've got her," said Fred briefly.

He took her by the hand and pulled her toward her horse. She hesitated a moment. Then she yielded docilely, but as he helped her she clung to his hand a moment with gripping fingers. She was in the saddle again and before he released her hand he patted it with his other one encouragingly. Then he was herding her bulky father masterfully to his own horse and making him mount.

"Now then, beat it," he said incisively. "We've no time to lose."

He had taken the bridle of her horse again and was leading it on foot. They were going downward at a walk. The slope was gentle and there was grass underfoot. They went on and on until once again willows brushed them and they heard the tinkle and rush of water flowing over stones. The horses splashed into it and stooped their heads to drink. Motion ceased for the moment and then Lucille was being held and lifted from the saddle. Arms strong and yet gentle were around her. She felt rested, sleepy. Her arms crept trustingly round Fred's neck. She felt herself being carried a short distance and slowly lowered to a grassy bank.

"Hand me a blanket, George. She's all in," said Fred.

CHAPTER VIII

LOST LAKE

LUCILLE was sinking into a bottomless void filled with nightmare figures and lighted by the sulphurous fires of the pit. But something kept dragging her back against her will. Something was beating her hands, pulling at her, raising her. Yet still she sank in spite of it all and darkness came upon her and oblivion closed in on her like a soft cloud.

And then she came slowly to herself, filled with aches and dull pains and sharp, throbbing ones. She opened her eyes, which seemed to be glued together. They smarted and pricked. It was black around her and for the moment she thought she was blind.

She was being carried, and voices around her sounded in dispute. One of them was her father's and the other was that of Fred Strong.

"But, damn it all, why not stop a minute? We're out of the worst of it now. She can't stand much more. Neither can I."

"To hell with you!"

For the first time she heard anger and contempt in Fred's tone. It was a strained tone too, but she did not realize at once that this was because the weight of her was causing him distress. She was content to lie in his arms and rest—if the pains would cease and that smell of smoke would vanish. He was her man—her kind of man.

"I'm tired of your bluster and your damned folly! Get wise to yourself! You've fourflushed from the first and if you'd had your way not one of us would have been alive now. Leave her alone! I'll carry her—I'll carry her until hell gets us but I won't let her lie there until we're cut off again."

"Put her on a horse, Boss!" That was Fetters speaking.

"I'll not! The horses can't carry her. Get on to your jobs and leave me to mine."

"You talk as if she wasn't my job," snarled Updyke. "She's my daughter."

"She's my job and mine alone!" Fred's voice was shrill and it came to the girl, wonderingly, that he was breaking under the strain. "Let her sleep! She's mine, I tell you."

"I've something to say about that," said Updyke angrily.

"You!" said Fred. "What have you to say? The less you say the better—especially about this. I've got her! She's mine! I'll keep her!"

He was striding along under the dead weight of her, the veins standing out on his forehead, grim, snarling, battling now with the remnants of his force for possession of her who was breaking his back and wasting the last of his magnificent strength. He felt her stir in his arms and for an instant her hands tightened on his neck and then she squirmed and tried to slip from his grasp, at last awake and aware of her own weariness and his.

"It's all right!" he said gruffly. "I'm carrying you."

"Let me down," she said. "I can walk."

"You be quiet!"

"No," she said. "I want to get down."

His grip on her tightened for the moment and then released her slowly. Her feet tingled and stung as they struck the ground and for a time she could hardly stand until the circulation came back to them. She looked at Fred to find his eyes red and drawn and his grimy face wistfully hungry on her own. She tried to smile and let her hand slip to his. Then she looked at the others.

They were walking in a dim and still murky twilight, but it was not the impenetrable gloom she recalled. The horses, halting and limping, were being led, unable to carry any more weight. Black shadows of rough ledges rose around them. Far overhead when she glanced up she saw the dim, hazy spark of a star and something ghostly, watery white that was the moon. There were no trees in sight.

They walked. Her father walked beside her and became garrulous in his anxiety for her well being. Had he thought

of her at all during that wild and nightmare flight? Had he thought of any one but himself? She felt some shame at recollection of her absorption in her own perils and sufferings. Only Fred Strong had, it seemed, thought constantly of her and of how he was to save them all.

She held to his hand, her grip tightening on it. He had said she was his, had shown a disposition to resist any claim to the contrary. It was true. She was his, won by him—if he wanted her. Her father's talk wearied her.

They walked on, slowly and painfully. None of them had strength left to make any speed. But they seemed safe at least. They were in barren and rocky country on some great, bleak slope—or rather on some rugged wall of terraced heights. Smoke drifted over them and the wind still blew, but there were no trees to burn here and no grass to flame lustily.

A long time passed and they still dragged themselves wearily along moderately level but rock strewn ledges, only to come to a place where they must slip and slide downward over loose sand and rocks that bruised them, dragging the stumbling, reluctant horses after them. On and on they went until the night seemed an endless age of darkness and weariness.

Fred still held to Lucille's hand. It seemed to both of them that they had been walking and stumbling and climbing downward in that manner since the beginning of time and would keep on until time ended. The roar of blazing timber came to them as from a distant world. Now and then they saw horizons lighted up with ruddy reflections swimming in black mountains of smoke. But they seemed far away.

At last they came on to slopes still steep but not like the succession of terraced cliffs behind them. They leveled out as they proceeded, now barely able to drag weary feet along. Fred staggered along, always in advance and always he held to Lucille's hand as though it gave him some mysterious strength.

Off to the right they now began to see more trees, trees which seemed to form tongues of blackness against dim but lighter patches. It was slowly growing lighter too. The night was giving way to the dawn but also the smoke was welling and swelling again behind them. Looking back, they could see the forbidding loom of the great height of terraced rock down which they had come and over its crest the clouds were swooping. But no fire could come on them from that direction. There was nothing there to feed it.

But from the left, far away but distinct even in the night, they could see and hear the advancing flames. Down there were trees and brush and the fire seized avidly upon them. But it could not reach where they now were. Yet there were trees ahead of them and to the right of them. Trees were fuel for fire.

Still Fred pushed on. Fetters and George followed without a word. But Updyke muttered and wondered and would have criticized perhaps, had not his daughter turned on him at the first word with such a look that it cowed even him.

THEY heard now the gentle murmur of water rippling against a beach. Stony ground met them and bruised their feet again. Trees shadowed them and enfolded them. They seemed to be walking now into the very perils they had so strenuously fled from. But a delightful coolness was in the air and even the smell of smoke could not lessen the delight of the breeze.

They trod on ground soft with pine needles and the wind whispered in the tall trees. They came to a glade where in front of them placid, rippling water glittered and shown under the dim and half obscured light of stars and moon.

Fred gently let her sink to the soft ground. Utter weariness came on her in a flood. A blanket was spread for her.

"Lost Lake," said Fred softly. "We ought to be safe here."

He still held her hand when she closed her eyes and sank to sleep.

Hours and hours later Fred awakened to find himself lying there, Lucille's hand in his own. It was daylight, but the sun, still a great red ball in the sky palled with smoke, was low again. He roused the others after gently disengaging his hand. They awoke with groans, stiff and burned so that at first they could comprehend only the fact of their sufferings. Then to each of them came slow realization and memory of that fearful journey and flight. But for the time it was impossible to realize that only eighteen or twenty hours had passed since they had left the camp on the flat and plunged into that nightmare.

But Denver George, the first to react normally, was at work gathering firewood and starting breakfast. Fetters, limping painfully, cursed impersonally as he helped the cook. The horses stood dejected and lame under shadowing trees. The meager pack of their sole remaining packhorse lay with its contents scattered about. Over it George and Fred held a frowning, low voiced consultation.

They turned over three blankets, a number of utensils, a small collection of canned stuff and a miscellany of parcels that had been in the packs. Of these there was one that Lucille recognized. It was a package made of the more personal effects and papers that had belonged to young Bardelle, a package she herself had assisted Fred to collect and tie up. They were destined for delivery to his parents.

She had difficulty in rising and so had her father, huddled nearby. But as he straightened his sore and aching body she was surprised to note that he swore only lowly and under his breath. He seemed subdued and quiet and gave no indication of the blustering manner that had characterized him. Still further was she surprised when, without a word to the others, he first went to the brink of the lake and slaked his thirst and then turned to the horses.

He fell to work on them, rubbing them down with handfuls of pine needles, massaging their aching limbs and brushing out of their hides the matted sweat and dirt. The poor beasts needed his ministrations but they also needed food and there seemed to be very little of the latter. The pines towered all around them, but there was very little brush and the grass showed very sparsely through the mat of pine needles that covered the ground.

They were all ravenously hungry, but the breakfast which George finally served up was none too satisfying. There was a little bacon, flapjacks, no butter, no coffee or tea, and one can of beans. The significance of this came home to all of them, but no one said anything about it. Instead they scrutinized the area around them, seeking in it some answer to the problem that was still unanswered. Were they safe?

Safe enough from the fire, it seemed. They were on a long tongue of land which ran from a bare spur of the terraced and rugged heights that bordered this side of the lake. Trees grew on the tongue, but there were none on the shores or the heights. No forest fire could reach here unless embers blown across the lake should set fire to the grove in which they camped. But the lake itself lay placid and blue before them, at least three-quarters of a mile wide and three long. Across it they could see forest growth stretching to its lower limits.

In that black sea of distant timber peninsulas and islands of smoke curled and drifted on the wind. But that wind blew across the lake and carried the flame and the smoke well away from their refuge. Back of them, on the route they had traversed the night before, the wall of terraced barrens reared itself, offering no food to the fire demons. The bleak rows of ledges merged into more regular heights off to the left and on these were gullies sloping down; gullies which held patches of timber and grass dried to tinder. In one or two of these but far off toward the farther side of the lake the fire was already creeping, but it offered no danger to them.

And behind the rimming heights smoke billowed to the skies and spread over it

where the blaze raged and swept onward to the north and west. Far away they could see the upper slopes of the mountain wall to which Updyke had advised retreating. It stood rugged and forbidding but softened in outline now by the gray, snaky, twisting patches of smoke that bit upon it and climbed upward. Smoke on all sides of them; fire in every quarter of the compass, yet in this pocket no fire could reach them. Yes, they were safe—from fire. But of food there was barely enough, on short rations, for two days.

They had two rifles, Lucille's having been lost out of the boot of her saddle somewhere on the route. George's fishing tackle was gone. It had been lashed on one of the missing packs. But he had two or three flies on a leader which he had stuck in the hatband of his dilapidated Stetson, and a piece of line which he carried in his pocket. This fact brightened the prospect amazingly.

It was evident to all that this forest fire was no ordinary affair of acres or square miles. It had been deliberately set by men working on a far flung line, set in many places and with the intent of burning over a vast territory and rendering it untenable to those whom the incendiaries deemed undesirable invaders of their refuges. There was no question of that. Nor was there question of fighting it. Only the vast and efficient organization of the Forest Service, not to be born yet for another ten years, could have tackled it. There was not even a forest ranger within fifty miles or more of them, and the scanty personnel of the existing reserve service would have been utterly helpless in the face of this conflagration, even if it had been able to mobilize against it.

No; the fire must burn for days as the wind and the weather dictated and for other days the waste of smoldering timber, bare and stripped and dead, and the glowing coals of the windfall tangles must cool and die out before they could move. And when they did move they must travel across far flung wildernesses of blasted ground in which the game was absent and fled and where the streams flowed, soot blackened, with the fish killed by the searing heat. And they had no provisions.

Denver George, grinning, was rigging his line and flies to a branch and trying his luck in the lake. No lack of food here. The ravenous trout leaped for his hooks with a ferocity that threatened to carry them away. He angled skilfully and ruthlessly and the pile of fish grew steadily as he pulled them in.

They dined royally that evening on crisp trout.

CHAPTER IX

YOUTH'S HERITAGE

A WEEK passed; a week of readjustments and then of growing impatience when day after day Fred Strong and Fetters climbed to the heights of the barrens bordering the lake and scanned the horizons. It was a week in which reticences and silence grew within them and where the intimacies that had marked the whirl of excitement and peril attending the flight died away and gave place to reserves and concealments.

There was nothing to do beyond a few easy tasks, and little to talk about. But Fred Strong remained much as he always was. Fetters was stolid and uncommunicative. Denver George had few ideas and most of those centered on loyalty to his boss.

Updyke was subdued and meek. He worked more than the others, unnecessarily but as though he sought relief in useless tasks from the contemplation of his own failure. Lucille had become shy and silent. There had been a wild moment when the bars were down, but in that moment perils and imperative haste had prevented all settlement of problems and in this lull the realities had assumed their proper position. Strong knew himself for what he was—a poorly paid Government employee with a problematic future and he knew Lucille for what she was and could not help being. She moved in a world remote from his own. He had

no place in her world and he could not bring her into his own.

Then one day Fred gave the word and they packed. The horses, gaunt from starvation, were strong enough to carry them and their one pack was pitifully light. There were still fires burning, but they smoldered or flamed far away and the ridges and cañons that lay between them and the world from which they had been cut off seemed to lie burned and blasted and bare in the stark sunlight. There had been one day of rain, belated and inadequate, but it must have cooled and drowned most of the smoldering fires.

There followed hours of travel, which gradually grew almost as fearsome as those of the great flight. No longer did they race through choking clouds of smoke and dodge drifting embers or pant and strain in confused haste up heart-breaking heights or down into threatening infernos. But they paced in enforced slowness along high hogbacks and ridges on which the gaunt spikes of blasted trees stood like ranks of soldiers dead in their lines and reduced to skeletons.

Ashes and cinders littered the ground and the charred trunks against which they brushed unavoidably smeared them with charcoal. Gummy resin from half burned wood stuck to them like glue. Dust and soot rose in clouds under the feet of the horses and choked them.

Now and then they were forced by the nature of the ground to descend from the heights and cross or follow for some distance the gullies that separated the ridges. Here they came into tangles and walls of burned and charred débris, where the trees from the slopes had fallen and crashed downward. The axes came into play often, and again Updyke got relief from his humiliation by working manfully.

As much as possible they kept to the high ground, but their progress was slow. They camped that first night in the burned timber and went on again through miles of it on the following morning. They had little to eat, for they had been unable to carry many fish and the country had been swept bare of game while the streams held no trout. Again, however, some of the barriers that had reasserted themselves in the camp by the lake were dropped in the comradeship of toil and misery. But only for a short time.

On the evening of the second day, riding ahead with Lucille, Fred Strong suddenly flung up an arm and pointed. Across a burned and dessicated hollow rose another slope in a long tongue and on that tongue grew trees, green trees and healthy trees, dark and cool where pine and spruce and fir clustered, golden and white and dancing where the aspen groves shivered in the sunlight. Other slopes rose behind and on either side and on them the ranked forest reared, unburned and majestic.

And now Fred was slipping out of his saddle with a word of caution. He had a rifle and he crept like a fox down into the charred mass that filled the cañon, slipping swiftly but carefully through the débris. Over fallen logs, himself as black as they, he slipped while the girl watched him. She had no eyes at the moment for anything else but him. He had seen something, but for some minutes she did not look to see what it was.

Then it occurred to seek out what he was stalking and she turned to scan the slope toward which he was working his way. After a search she saw what it was. At the edge of the timber, ambling lazily about, turning a log here and there and snuffling and grubbing into its rotten interior, a bear made a leisurely meal. It would have been too long a shot from where she sat and Fred was stalking it to get a surer shot at it.

The rest of the party ranged behind her and watched the bear and the climbing black figure of the hunter. They were eager and tense, for the hunt meant meat to them.

Two men on horseback suddenly rode into view across the slope but some distance from the bear. They drew rein and wheeled. Lucille saw them first, distant against the trees. The bear wheeled and

held up his head, sniffing the air and then began a sidling, rapid retreat. One of the men gestured and stooped. A rifle showed tiny in his hand, was leveled—

Lucille screamed loudly and spurred her horse. The animal leaped convulsively. She had cried out and driven on in a wild conviction that the shot was aimed at Fred, though he was still far down the slope and hidden from the men. The little spurt of flame showed, a puff of smoke! Where her horse had stood a cloud of dirt shot up. A moment later came the crack of the report and the horses wheeled and plunged. George was swearing and dragging at a rifle which Updyke had at his saddle.

Another crack echoed faintly. Lucille's horse was far down the slope entangled in burned branches and débris. She was slipping from the saddle and scrambling recklessly down in search of Fred. But he had stood still on the other height, his rifle poised, searching the slope for sight of the man who had fired.

The others saw the man who had fired twist and fall from his saddle and lie on the ground, his horse leaping away in evident fright. The second man, rifle out, stared from his rearing horse down on that still figure and then wheeled and went crashing off through the trees, body bent low over his horse's neck.

Lucille ran on, crying out for Fred. He waited for her. Somehow, blackened and choked, she burst her way through the tangle of burned brush and climbed with laboring breath toward him. He stood there unharmed and collected and she sank down almost exhausted at his feet.

"Are you all right?" she gasped. He helped her up. He was obviously intact and she broke into a hysterical laugh. "Of course. It was silly of me but I thought he had shot you."

"Who had shot me?"

"A man. He fired—I thought at you!"

"I see!" said Fred grimly.

He turned and began again his ascent, his rifle ready and his jaw set and grim. Up and up he went and Lucille, still panting, crept blindly after him. Up and up to the first leveling of the slope and sight of the forest edge ahead of them. But there lay there only a man who sprawled and did not move. Fred stepped forward, rifle ready and poised, eyes alert. There was a movement among the trees and he flung the gun into position.

A MAN rode from the forest with a hand upheld in the sign of amity. Fred hesitated. There was something familiar in the fellow's bearing and dress.

"Don't shoot, *amigo!*" called the man.

Fred lowered the rifle, looking from the rider to the figure on the ground. The man slipped from saddle beside it and beckoned him forward. He went slowly, rifle still poised, until he stood looking down at a face, vicious, weasel-like, under a growth of black beard through which yellow teeth showed. The man was dead, shot through the head.

"You know him?" asked the stranger.

He had heard the voice before, and he turned on the man in sudden, narrow eyed suspicion. A brutal jaw under the sagging shade of a broad brimmed hat, a shifty, sinister face, vague in outline. He knew it for that of the stranger who had come to his camp and given him warning that surveyors were not wanted on Squaw Creek. He half raised his gun.

"Hold on, pardner!" said the man. "I'm the guy that beefed this *hombre.* Lucky fer you." He was speaking to some one back of Fred and he turned to find Lucille there, gazing at the dead man. "You don't know him? Well, that's the guy they call Pima Joe and he killed the young feller from your outfit. I wish't I'd got the other one, but he was too quick."

"Who are you?" demanded Fred. The man grinned evilly.

"There's a heap would like to know," he said sourly.

He stooped and picked up a piece of white quartz and with a pencil he marked it with a peculiar hieroglyphic in which a cross figured. This he placed beneath the dead man's head. At this action

Fred started and stared at the man as if he saw a ghost. The fellow mounted his horse.

"Your outfit from Porcupine are ten miles over thataway on Beaver Creek," he said. "So long. You ain't seen no one and you don't know nobody." And he rode away.

"Who was that?" asked Lucille in dread. Fred shook his head. "No one knows," he said. "I've heard tales. A killer—hired to murder—this sort of thug!" And he pointed to the dead outlaw. "Effective I suppose but, *ugh!*" And he shuddered.

They went back silent and constrained and took up the march again. Two hours later they rode into the camp of the main party which had been driven from Mount Porcupine and there they found the men whom Fetters had sent on, and those who had been with Bardelle, all safe and sound.

Updyke came to Strong later, when arrangements were complete for his going out with Lucille. He held out his hand to the surveyor and Fred took it with a smile.

"Young fellow," said the engineer, "you've showed me up for the good of my soul, but I don't bear any malice. I can use a man like you in my business and—er—Lucille wants you to take a job that's up to your merits. What do you say?"

A darkness came over Fred's face and he looked the other in the eye.

"Say?" he said. "I've nothing to say. I've a job here and I'm sticking with it. You understand?"

Updyke turned red and gulped.

"I guess so," he said. "I—er—I'm sorry!"

Fred went out to join Fetters.

"We'll be going back in tomorrow, old man," he said equably. "That base line has got to be rerun."

"Sure, boss!" said Fetters stolidly. But a little later, "What happened with old Blowhard?" he asked. "You turned him down?" Fred laughed bitterly.

"I'm not for sale," he said shortly.

WINTER came and the snows fell on the blasted wilderness that was Squaw Creek. In an office building in Denver Strong and Fetters and others of his men toiled now at work which to Strong grew ever more and more irksome. The base line was run and the triangulation of Squaw Creek was an accomplished fact, though another season of work in completing the survey remained. This winter had passed slowly and monotonously in the interminable plotting of notes and drawing of maps. He was weary and depressed.

If he could escape to other fields, lose himself in work that was big, forget all that was vivid in his mind now. The thought that in another few months the spring thaws would send him back to Squaw Creek gave him a dull pain and yet he was eager to go, eager at any cost of painful memory to escape from the routine work and deaden himself with the toil of field work. A surveyor, doomed to mediocrity and obscurity; a bureaucrat doomed to a shroud of red tape!

He worked methodically, bending over his protractor and triangles, scribbling his calculations; but the pencil lines that he drew straight and accurate wavered before his eyes and took on curves and resolved themselves into the outlines of a girl's face. He brushed his hand over his eyes.

Some one spoke.

"Right at that desk over there!"

A man stood beside him and he looked up to behold an elderly, gray and sad faced gentleman, with steady eyes and firm mouth. He was a small man, but he looked important and Fred wondered.

"Mr. Strong? My name is Bardelle."

Fred took the proffered hand. He felt embarrassed and delinquent. Young Bardelle's death was in no way his fault but in his present mood he felt as though it had been. Some one else—a woman—was moving through the desks back there, but he did not look up to see. And Bardelle was talking again, evenly, sadly, but impressively.

"Miss Updyke brought his things to us

and in them was a letter he had written but had not had time to send out. I want to read it to you. It concerns you in a measure—this part at least. He says:

> "I hope to make a good engineer for you, dad, and I think I will; but if I do it will be as much due to the example of a real man I have before me as to any ability of mine. Our chief, Strong, is a wonder and you'd find him a much more valuable asset to your organization than I could ever hope to be. I know men, even if I'm not yet an engineer, and I tell you that if you can hire him away from Uncle Sam you'll have a prize. Trust me and get him, dad, and I'll go bail you won't regret it. He's all man and all there when it comes to his job.

"That's what my son wrote about you, Mr. Strong, and I believe he spoke the truth."

"It's kind of you," muttered Fred.

Vistas were opening again to his mind, vistas on which he had closed his eyes. If young Bardelle, of whom he had been jealous, had only lived—if his father had followed his advice—

"Not kind," said Mr. Bardelle. "My son had good judgment. I have no son now. He admired you. I'd like to—you knew him—and, if you'd come with us perhaps you might in a way fill the place he was destined to fill. We have work, much work, worthy of a man of talent. Will you do it for us?"

Fred sat stunned. And then, as this consummation of his ambitions came home to him, there rose again the vision of something else he had renounced, something he had turned his back upon, with a scorn that was almost an insult. Once he would have leaped at this chance but now he was not sure. Did he care? Did it matter to him whether his name should be spoken in the haunts of men who did things or whether it should go down to oblivion? Fame and achievement would not bring him one thing he had renounced when he had scorned the offer of Updyke. It would not bring him Lucille.

He looked up at the sad old man who stood there patiently. Behind him the woman who had entered the room was standing now, smiling at him with a little red flush in her cheeks. Her eyes pleaded with him and dropped.

"I came with Mr. Bardelle," said Lucille meekly.

"Aye," said Fred, and there was a tremble of laughter in his voice. "And I'm going with Mr. Bardelle."

"I am very glad," said Mr. Bardelle and he laid a hand on a shoulder of each of them. "I am very glad indeed."

Fred choked a little.

"And so are we," he said.

Innuit Ingenuity

By

VICTOR SHAW

MY INTRODUCTION to the north Greenland walrus was in McCormick Bay, where extensive clam beds provide a favorite feeding ground and where great herds huddle upon ice floes basking in the midnight sun of the short summer.

My two Eskimos—or as they style themselves, Innuits— had their harpoons ready as we rowed the whaleboat straight for a floe containing fifty or sixty of the big brutes. I had my rifle, but merely watched, not learning until later that I could drop them where they lay with one well directed shot in the back of the head.

Kiowa, crouched in the bow, leaped upon the floe and slammed his heavy weapon into a huge tusker before the clumsy beast could shuffle away. At the same instant old Meeyu tossed overside the drag and float and both Innuits took to the kayacks we towed behind.

The rest of the herd were in the water all around us, enraged by the bellow of the harpooned bull. One came up under the boat and smashed the rudder. Another hooked his tusks over the gunwale, but sank with a bullet in his gaping throat. It was the only danger, easily circumvented, for a volley sent them all down.

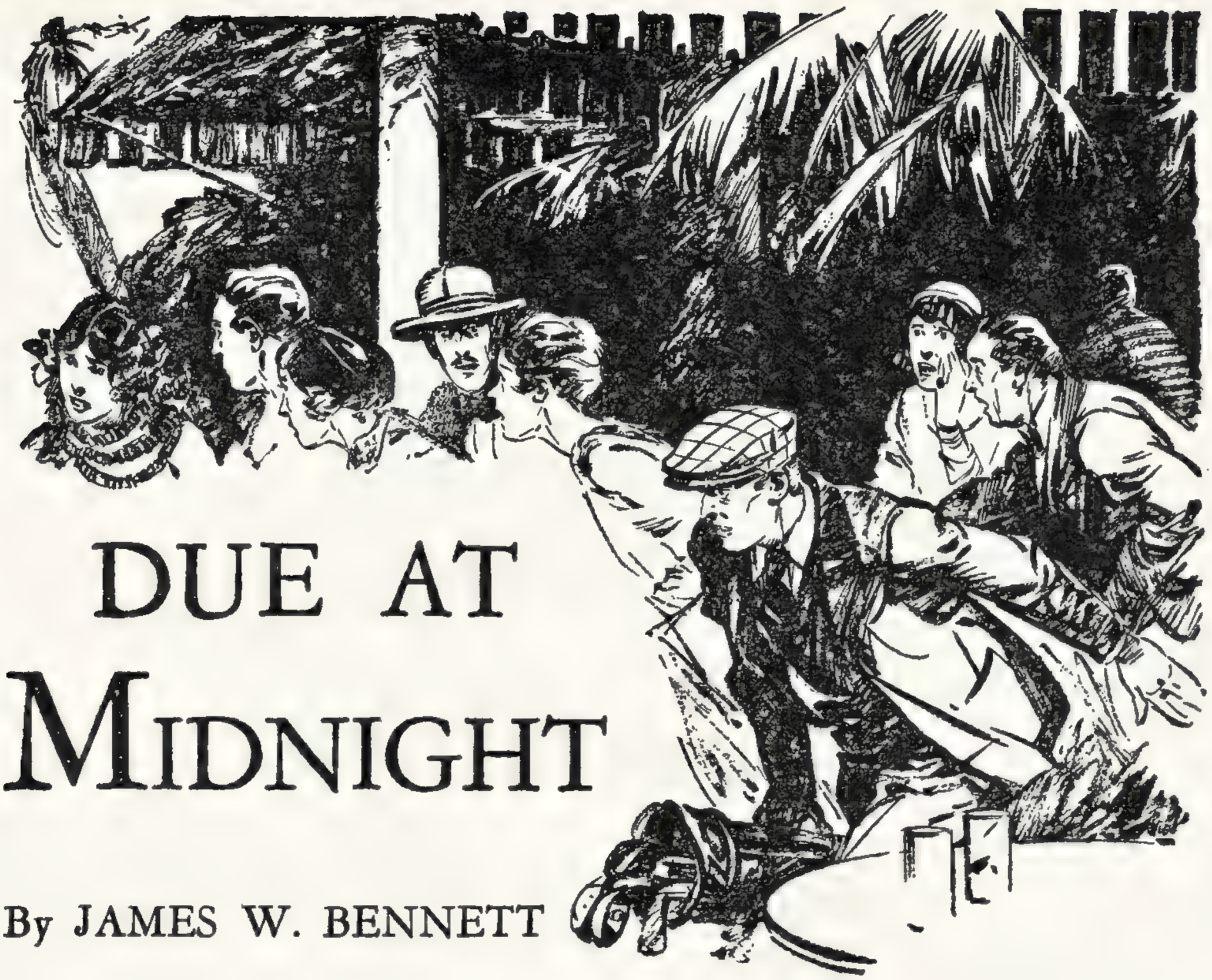
Meanwhile the Innuits were darting about their quarry in their frail kayacks like two kingbirds after a hawk, jabbing, stabbing with their killing spears, until a shrewd thrust reached the heart.

Killed as it rose to expel the air in its lungs, the walrus sank and hung suspended by the big sealskin float. It was some twenty feet long and must have weighed close to two tons. How to get the immense weight out where I could get the tusks and the natives could get the meat had me stumped, but the Innuits went about the job with the unconcern of long experience.

The inert mass was towed to a floe having a wave washed sloping rim. Kiowa hopped out with his ice knife. About twenty feet back and parallel with the ice edge, he chipped a narrow trench about eight inches deep. Six inches behind it he sank another and joined the two by a small hole underneath. It was a miniature ice bridge, stout enough to support a greater weight than our walrus.

Meanwhile Meeyu had joined several harpoon lines to form a long single rope of strong rawhide. Fastening one end of this to a three-inch slit cut in the neck hide of the walrus, Kiowa passed the other end under the ice bridge and back through the neck slit. At last I understood. We now had a crude block and tackle, and by hauling on the fall end we hauled our quarry upon the floe with absurd ease.

Centuries ago, perhaps huddled in a snow igloo over the flaming moss wick of a stone lamp, with a blizzard screaming in the winter night outside, some fur clad Archimedes solved the problem of handling heavy weights on land and sea. Nor is this the sole example of their mechanical skill and knowledge. They are primitive, true, but thinkers, these stubby little men of the Arctic waste.



DUE AT MIDNIGHT

By JAMES W. BENNETT

A Story of Honolulu and a Tidal Wave

MY OWN catastrophe was completely occupying my mind when I heard of the impending disaster. All evening I had felt the world crumbling to small pieces about me. And I was in the mood to kick them into still finer bits of rubble. When I say this desperate state of mind was occasioned by a quarrel with Doris, I realize that I lay myself open to charges of hyper-emotionalism. But it had been more than an ordinary quarrel. It had closely resembled war.

The initial impetus had been trivial enough—a dance at the Manola Hotel on Waikiki Beach, plus a weedy ensign of the American Navy who wanted to accompany Doris. The ensign had been with Doris entirely too much of late, and I had enlarged the scope of hostilities to include this wider issue. Doris had affirmed her inalienable right to attend as many dances with as many ensigns as she wished. She had stated that she was of legal age and from that moment no longer engaged to me. Upon this note we had parted.

That night, of all nights, had to be the one on which Wilks, my city editor, was out. In fact he was completely out, hav-

ing attended a political *luau* that afternoon, a feast at which an astonishingly large amount of *okolehao* had been imbibed. The sturdy *oke*, as we say here in Honolulu, had felled him. Our star reporter also was away, prowling about the Portuguese settlement, looking for the "Calabash Murderer". He fancies himself as an amateur detective, having once solved one of our Island mysteries—a very unfortunate occurrence, for the city editor has never since been able to persuade him to do any routine work.

Therefore, I, cubbiest of the cubs, aged twenty-two, with more ideas than experience, was alone in the city room when the news broke.

The voice at the other end of the phone was excited, and when I learned who owned the voice I became excited too. It was the admiral of the Hawaiian Fleet. Not his orderly, or his aide de camp, but the great man himself. His words came in spurts:

"This—Honolulu *Telegram?* This . . . Admiral Sturgis speaking. I must talk with . . . editor! Without instant's—delay! Gravest importance! Lives of everybody on the Island—depend upon editor."

Automatically I stalled for time, saying:

"Just a moment, Admiral. I'll call him."

I laid down the receiver and did some quick thinking. I couldn't say that Wilks, the city editor, was temporarily *non compos mentis*. Loyalty prohibited that. The managing editor was on the mainland and the owner of the paper was an ancient man who had long ago severed all active connection with us. Unquestionably it devolved upon me to carry on.

"Uh—uh—Admiral, this is the city editor."

"I have a radiogram . . . just come in. I'll read it to you:

"NOME, ALASKA. OCTOBER 2, 8 P.M.

STURGIS, ADMIRAL IN COMMAND,
PEARL HARBOR NAVAL BASE,
HONOLULU
SEVERE EARTHQUAKE IN ALEUTIAN ISLANDS STARTED TIDAL WAVE OF UNUSUAL DIMENSIONS, CONVERGING ON HAWAIIAN GROUP. WAVE SHOULD STRIKE OAHU MIDNIGHT. WARN INHABITANTS.
—JENKINSON, COAST AND GEODETIC SURVEY.

"Midnight, you understand? It's now eight-thirty. We have three and a half hours to rouse Honolulu. The populace must be made to seek high ground. . . . Of course, you'll keep my name out of this. Officially, I can't act. Actually I shall cooperate in every way I can. But you're the news disseminator. I am depending upon you."

"Admiral, you may indeed depend upon the Honolulu *Telegram!*" I answered a little breathlessly. "I am glad you realize we are the most potent power in this community. While our circulation is technically a little less than that of our rival, the Honolulu *Times*, it exceeds theirs in quality—"

An exclamation came from the other end of the wire, and I hurried on:

"In ten minutes an extra will be on the street. In fifteen, the fire department will make the air resound with sirens. In twenty the police will begin chivvying the citizenry up Pacific Heights, the Punch Bowl, Nuuanu Valley. . . ." I leaned back in my chair, astonished at my virtuosity. Then I dared greatly. "How about your officers—ah—your ensigns? Why couldn't they be put to some *useful* work, such as—as directing traffic?"

"What?" The admiral's tone was peculiarly stuffy.

"Well," I plunged on, "what are *you* going to do about this tidal wave?"

For an instant choking sounds came over the wire.

"I've already ordered the men to their posts. They will quell any panic—or looting. And—uh—uh—I shall permit the ensigns to—ah—go to strategic points of—ah—traffic."

Then, as the indignity apparently overcame him, I caught the sharp click of the telephone.

MY MIND was in an emotional jumble. Upon my shoulders rested the burden of a tidal wave. I was alternately thrilled, chilled, stimulated, frightened. I thought if Doris could but see me now, with the destinies of Honolulu in my hands—would that steely look have faded from her eyes? Would she have said, "Tom, I was wrong not to have gone to the dance with you—even though it did mean waiting until eleven-thirty while you put the paper to bed.

My day dream frayed a bit thin at this point. For Doris had pettishly pointed out that such an arrangement would have left her only half an hour of dancing.

Then a new thought obtruded itself. Waikiki Beach would probably be the unhealthiest spot on the Island when the tidal wave hit. Doris must be gotten away. In my eagerness to pry the ensign from her side I had made the traffic suggestion which would rob her even of the young officer's poor protection.

However, I had promised to spread the alarm to the city. The lives of many people depended on my efforts. I must give my warnings as rapidly as possible and then rush down to Waikiki.

I jammed a sheet of copy paper into the typewriter and speeded through a fifty word story. I blocked out a flaring head and pressed the buzzer for Manuel Machado, our back room foreman. He appeared at the door, yawning, an ink roller in his hand.

"Manuelo, an extra to be gotten out *wikiwiki!* Here's the copy. Speed is to be your middle name."

Manuel slouched toward me, yawning again. He is a *hapa-haole,* that is to say, half Hawaiian and half Portuguese—and altogether mule.

"I get out no extra," he said flatly. "I am tired. *Pau*—finished. Only city editor can persuade me to get out extra. The two linotypemen are tired. The pressmen are tired. This is hot weather. Too hot. The humidity, it is frrrightful."

"I happen to be boss of the front office, and that is my order. The city editor put me in charge during his last rational moment. Besides, read this. It came by phone from Admiral Sturgis."

He read, but with no mounting enthusiasm.

"That is a good story. We'll run it on inside page of bulldog edition."

"There'll be no bulldog. This place will be flooded and you'll be drowned unless you get away before midnight."

"I think not," said Manuel. He started to ease himself toward the back room—without my story.

I should have to light a fire under the good mule. I called belligerently after him:

"Manuel, come back! If you don't get out that extra, I'll have to tell the owner of this paper that he is harboring a bigamist as foreman of his press room. A bigamist with a Hawaiian wife in Honolulu and a *paké* spouse with bound feet in Kailua. You yourself told me that when the *Telegram* had its anniversary and, as the poets say, the *oke* was hot within you."

"Ori'," said Manuel heavily. "I get out extra. But I think tomorrow the *Times* will laugh like hell at us." He departed with my bit of copy paper dangling limply from his hand.

I called up police headquarters. The desk sergeant unfortunately recognized my voice and was skeptical. A nasty laugh can be twice as galling over the phone. But he called me back after he had gotten in touch with the admiral, his tone changed and apologetic, on the verge of trembling. He had connected with the chief of police and the fire chief. Both of them had called out the reserves.

I turned to the spindle. The First Gospel Church for the Hawaiians was having a *hula* contest with a throng of some five hundred Polynesians in attendance. The bamboo flail and feathered gourd *hulas* were to be performed. Once these were in progress it would be difficult—practically impossible—to disperse the crowd.

However, I phoned. A small boy answered. In opposition to a quartet of semi-falsetto voices engaged in a hic-

coughing chant, I explained the danger. When I had finished I was told, in that peculiar accent affected by the young of our city, to "gawr chase" myself.

In spite of this setback I went determinedly on. Time was whizzing by with sickening speed. On each occasion that I glanced at the clock above my desk it seemed to have leaped forward a quarter of an hour. I could hear my voice growing more frenzied and less coherent.

The Knights of Kamehameha were holding a Lodge of Sorrow. The Assistant Grand Keeper of the Outer Gate answered my summons. He was dubious. Yes, he agreed with me that calamity threatened. But it would take him two hours to work his way into the lodge room. He had sworn too grisly an oath to consider entering in any but the way prescribed by ritual. From that position he could not be moved.

Almost frantic, I called up the Chinese Theater.

"A tidal wave is due here at midnight. Tell your people to leave the theater quietly and hurry to the nearest high ground."

"What you wan'?"

"A tidal wave is due at midnight—"

"What you wan'?"

"I said a tidal wave is—"

"Aw you b'long clazy topside!" And the receiver clicked.

At this point Manuel entered and gloomily flopped a wet sheet of newspaper on my desk. He said—

"I call up five newsboy and send 'im on street."

Picking up the extra, I read:

TIDAL WAVE HEADED FOR HONOLULU
FLEE TO HILLS IS WARNING

Vast Comber of More than a Hundred Feet Due to Strike Waterfront at Midnight

A small cold shiver rippled up and down my spine. The admiral's radiogram had not said what the dimensions of the tidal wave might be—hence my improvised headline. What if the wave were a hundred feet high? A great, thundering, devastating wall. Tons upon tons of the blue Pacific moving in upon us. Waikiki wiped off the map. Gone the beach boy, gigolo of the Islands, with his bottle of coconut oil, his ukelele, his surf board, his outrigger canoe. Gone the tourist with his gallantly tossed dollars and his painful sunburn.

And then—good Lord! Those scientists were clever at judging time and distance, but suppose—in his pardonable excitement—the chap up in Nome had tripped on a decimal, and the wave arrived in Honolulu before midnight?

Doris! I'd have to get her away from the beach—and quickly. I had done all I could at the office. Now I must dash out to her. So much had happened that our quarrel seemed a dim, unsubstantial thing. Probably by the time I arrived Doris would have forgotten it. In her fear she would turn to me. I'd show her that I was worth a dozen ensigns!

AS I PUSHED my small motor car to the limit of its speed my thoughts centered busily on Doris. I must rush her to her home, which was located far up the heights. I hoped she would go quietly with me and not be filled with some insane desire to linger and to see the wave strike. Phenomena should be viewed from a respectful distance.

It occurred to me that Doris was a bit of a phenomenon herself—a highly satisfactory one. Spending half her life on the beach, she has acquired a startling tan. Tourists, seeing her stride like some satin brown Venus up from the surf, have invariably mistaken her for an Hawaiian, and on occasions they have gone so far as to offer her a quarter to let them take her photograph.

I left my car and, somewhat breathless and disheveled, charged across the lawn of the hotel. A woman was standing by the driveway, her arms filled with a dozen billowing, perishable dresses.

"Has it come?" she inquired wildly.

And without waiting for an answer, she was off into the darkness like a rabbit,

evidently with the intention of making better time than the wave.

At the hotel I had some difficulty gaining an entrance, for the door was jammed by several determined outgoing gentlemen bearing golf bags which had become entangled. Picking out one of these for an attack, I shouldered him and his bag aside and dashed into the lobby. The floor was strewn with hand luggage that guests had brought to this point and then abandoned. I worked my way through the impedimenta, dodged hysterical women rescuing shoe trees and umbrellas; and at last I located Doris, minus the Naval escort.

She was not in tears; neither was she particularly cordial. I was struck afresh by her dark, impertinent beauty, unruffled in this turmoil. She was wearing crimson and silver with a gardenia *lei* about her throat, which all too plainly evidenced the delicate attentions of the ensign.

"Tom, who staged this show?" she promptly demanded.

"Staged what show?"

"This—" her hand swept over the human maelstrom.

"I'd hardly call it a show," I answered stiffly, remembering the heroic saga I had lived this evening.

"Well, perhaps you're right. Why not call it a shame? Breaking up an unusually decent party! Who's responsible?"

This wasn't the tender scene of reconciliation I had envisioned. A second corollary quarrel seemed to be brewing. I answered bluffly—

"I'm responsible."

"You?"

"Yes. And I'm going to take you home before the wave hits."

"Do you mean, Tom, that you actually believe there is going to be a tidal wave? You're the pirate who's been broadcasting this insane bit of rumor?"

I glared without answering.

Doris glared back. Then a new idea seemed to come to her. She gave me an awed, bleak look.

"Tom Westerfield, you appalling wretch! Of course you don't believe it! You've staged the whole affair! Staged it just to get back at me because I wouldn't go to the dance with you."

Doris darted away and I followed, too angry to justify myself. If she thought this, well, let her. I was determined to get her home before the wave struck. I caught her elbow. She shook off my grasp, yet she turned in the direction I was trying to pilot her. She continued to mutter in a maddening tone:

"It's your revenge against Ensign Thurlow. I must warn him not to go out alone on dark nights. You're not safe when you're crossed. To think that I've grown up with you and didn't know that you had these vicious spells."

At this instant Emil, the pachydermic head waiter of the hotel, lumbered up and barred our way. His normally protuberant eyes were fairly popping.

"Vat is this, Mr. Vesterfield? Vat has happened? Haf these pipples lost their minds?"

"No, they haven't, Emil. They're simply filled with a very normal desire to save their lives—before the catastrophe hits us."

"Catazdrophe, feedlesticks! Look at the sea! Calm as a zoup plate!"

We looked. Emil was—for the moment at least—perfectly right. The great *kanaka* breakers that crash over the outer reef were singularly gentle. As for the inner *wahine* surf, it was living up to its name of "women waves", suave and lazy.

I was suddenly conscious of a bloodthirsty wish that the sea would lift itself, then and there, in a fine big slosher, towering and creaming, so that I might have the exquisite pleasure of saying, "Well, didn't I tell you?"

But the moon was dappling the water with antique silver, a glorious patina. Out on the reef innocent Japanese fishermen were wading. Unconscious of impending disaster, red torches a-gleam, they slowly moved ready to net the first bedazzled squid that swam into their ken.

"Just wait until midnight, Emil," I said darkly. "Just wait. And if you don't

take steps—high, wide and handsome—toward the mountains, you'll find yourself swallowing half the Pacific."

Doris sniffed. But Emil's skepticism for the moment seemed daunted. He asked uncertainly:

"Can I dippend upon that that, Vesterfield? You're sure it's cooming?"

I nodded a vigorous affirmative. Somewhat to my surprise, Emil gave me a look of intense satisfaction and waddled fatly away. He headed—not for the hills but directly for the Outrigger Club on the beach below us.

Doris and I worked our way through a press of increasingly hysterical folk to the door. She commented scathingly:

"I don't know why I'm going with you. You're the least safe person in Honolulu. I do hope that the next time you're crossed you'll not get the idea of burning the city. So you can imitate Nero and play your uke while Honolulu fries!"

I ignored this. In an hour I would demonstrate my *bona fides*, demonstrate it all too successfully. My wrist watch told me it was just eleven o'clock.

THE LAST stretch of lawn was made through crowds of guests legging it to the hills. Many had been routed from slumber and were in various stages of dishabille. A man in a gray fedora hat, carrying a malacca stick, had donned a coat over blue silk pajamas. He waved blithely to me and shouted—

"It's what the well dressed man wears during a tidal wave!"

I came upon my motor car occupied by a family of three; father, mother and young daughter. The man, a minute specimen of cadaverous masculinity, turned belligerently and said:

"This is like war. I have commandeered this car. As soon as I can get it to run I'm going to take it."

"You can't run it without a key," I commented reasonably.

"Oh, Horace, so that's why it wouldn't start!" the wife remarked in strong accents of reproach.

Keeping his eyes fixed upon me, he retorted quickly—

"Then I shall take the key away from you."

"My car will hold five at a pinch," I told him. "If you'll allow us to take the front seat all three of you can climb into the rumble."

The family, relieved that open warfare had been averted, wedged themselves hurriedly in the rear. Doris took her place at my side. I started the motor.

"Shouldn't you be back on your job?" she asked sweetly. "Since you've worked up this Machiavellian plot, don't you think you should give the *Telegram* the advantage of the story?"

Doris, by the way, is the niece of that ancient man, our owner, and she knows more than a little about the internal workings of a metropolitan journal.

"Of course I'm going back, just as soon as I get you parked at home. There may be more news from the source from which this came."

She gave a chilling laugh.

"That's good! The source! I'm going to the office and see that you don't think up anything more devastating. You need to be watched."

"You're going home."

"Oh, no, I'm not, Tom. I'm going to the office if I have to jump out of the car and run after you."

I did some quick thinking. The *Telegram* was located upon fairly high ground. Possibly the city room on the second story might weather the impact of the wave. Besides, I knew that Doris was perfectly capable of springing from the machine without even waiting for it to slow down.

"All right," I gave in.

She smiled. Not that I extracted much comfort from her smile; it was too remote and triumphant.

We approached King Street and at the corner of that thoroughfare and Kalakaua Avenue stood Ensign Thurlow, directing traffic. The traffic semaphore, his arm, was turned against me, but I stepped on the gas and shot around the corner, grazing him.

He gave an agile leap and a startled yell.

"Hi, you confounded *malihini!* What do you think you are doing?"

I stopped the car, then threw it into reverse.

"If it isn't Ensign Thurlow! So you've joined the police force!"

"Oh, Lord, stop backing up! You're jamming my traffic! Pull out of here before I have you arrested!"

"You and who else?"

If I had planned the tidal wave my revenge couldn't have been sweeter. I who had been callously thrust aside earlier in the evening for this man, now to see him moiling through the hot night, unsnarling the tangle of frightened, impatient motorists! Possession was nine points of the law and for the moment at least, catastrophe or no catastrophe, I could claim Doris.

Doris leaned forward. Incredible as it may seem, she frowned at me with one side of her face and beamed on Thurlow with the other.

"I'm sorry, Jack," she began apologetically.

"Doris, I hoped you were home long ago. Isn't this a hellish night? I'm certainly having a fine, fat time! I'd give my sea boots to get at the man who started this asinine tidal wave rumor."

"Would you really? Then look at him, Jack, look at him. The sublime idiot is—"

But I gave Doris no opportunity to divulge my name. I set the gears with a bang, raced the motor and roared down the street.

We hadn't gone a mile before my car, badly used this evening, gave an asthmatic wheeze, two grunts, a low moan, and died. There was barely momentum left to draw up alongside the curb. I turned to my rear seat passengers.

"Everybody out. This is the end of the line. The hills are before you. Excelsior!"

Doris and I climbed out. The family of three sat staring in sullen suspicion. Then the man clambered from his place and pounced upon my vacated seat. He had his foot on the starter, his hands hopefully on the steering wheel.

I took Doris forcibly by the arm and hurried her up the street to the *Telegram* building. Behind us, growing fainter, I could hear my moribund starter, trying to turn over my defunct engine . . .

In silence we reached the plant and climbed the dingy old stairs. Would the building stand the shock if the wave reached it, I wondered? I wished that Doris could be a dozen miles from here.

BUT I threw open the door of the city room and motioned Doris to enter. The room seemed filled to overflowing, yet as a matter of fact it held but one occupant, the owner of the paper—a man of such vast proportions, mental and physical, that he invariably gave this illusion. He was wedged tightly into my swivel chair with my tidal wave extra spread before him, reading it with a concentration which I should have found flattering but which made me distinctly uneasy. He looked up and stared at us with cold speculative eyes, but did not speak.

"Well, well, well," I began weakly, "this is quite a party. Gathered to see the tidal wave, I take it?"

"We're gathered," said the owner in that deep voice which in an earlier day had intimidated a certain recalcitrant king of Hawaii Nei, "we're gathered to witness the obsequies of an old and honorable newspaper." His eyes bored into me under craggy white brows. "How does it feel to be a murderer?"

I shivered. From both the city and managing editors I had received the usual dressings-down that a young reporter gets, but this was the first time that Jovian soul, the owner, had applied the rod to my back.

"Answer me, Westerfield?"

"The wave is due at midnight," I heard myself replying in a low, small voice. "Any moment now—"

He lifted the huge mottled hand which grasped the extra.

"That isn't the point. A tidal wave isn't news until it has *struck!* I won't

have the *Telegram* harrying the whole of Honolulu up into the hills! I won't have it, I say! And what's more, I won't have you on the paper. You're finished—fired!"

"But, sir—"

"Such a rumor is criminally bad for business. The Honolulu *Telegram* has stood for progress, for expansion of business. I suppose you think this is good advertising? With the hotels alone, it will give the paper a black eye that—"

The phone rang. From force of habit I reached for the instrument.

"Editorial offices, Honolulu *Telegram*."

"This is Manola Hotel, Emil, chief of dining room. Say, I've hired me two outrigger canoes, and I haf a party that vants to ride in on the tidal vave. They're all egcited. It's the first time that anybody has ridden in on a tidal vave. Could you tell me yust when it is due, yes?"

I grasped at the last vestige of my optimism.

"Any moment, now," I answered and hung up.

I turned to the owner and explained apologetically.

"You see, sir, it is rather stimulating to business."

His face suddenly congested.

"Just the same, you're about as safe as a stick of dynamite. I won't have you around—"

"You know, uncle," Doris broke in cajolingly, "what the doctor said about avoiding excitement. I've a notion to report you to him."

The old man gave her a quick, furtive look. Then he asserted himself rebelliously:

"I'll fire my doctor! I'll certainly fire this Westerfield. I'm not going to have Honolulu upset—"

Cling-a-ling-a-ling! went the phone.

"Hello!" I answered.

"Is this Honolulu *Telegram?*"

"Yes."

"This is Emil, chief of dining room at Manola Hotel. Say, I've hired me a whole fleet of outrigger canoes. Every canoe on the beach. And more people coming back from the hills every minute, vanting to ride in on the tidal vave. But they're getting a leedle restless. Now vat time do you think?"

"I don't think, Emil. This isn't a matter for thought; it's one for faith!"

"Faith!" the owner echoed, as I hung up the phone. "My paper has a reputation for news and for news only. Westerfield, you're fired, unless you make good with your item and the tidal wave comes in." The old man rose and strode to the door. He paused there and gave me a last belligerent glare. "Just what time was your private little disaster supposed to occur?"

"Midnight, sir."

He glanced at the office clock, gave a slow, devastating smile, and the door slammed after him. I followed the direction his eyes had taken. The time was twenty-five minutes past midnight.

"THAT'S that," I said grimly. "Both the tidal wave and the *Telegram* have let me down. This certainly has been a nice prosperous evening."

"Tom—" Doris began hesitatingly. "Tom."

"You did your best, Doris. But I don't understand. Heading off your uncle and taking my part. Until a few minutes ago, you were down on me."

"Darling, it came over me, all in a flash. You staged this whole glorious hoax and lost your job, just to break up the ensign's party. Just for me!"

The truth, I suddenly saw, was a thing to be handled gingerly. Like a bomb, it might explode. I agreed with a nod and said earnestly—

"Dearest, you see how much I wanted you."

"You wanted me enough to turn a whole city topsy-turvy!"

"Wanted you enough to—to lose my job," I echoed rather hollowly, thinking that even reconciliation had not brought us much closer since I had lost the wherewithal to keep a wife.

"Your job," she repeated a little dubiously. "And uncle said you'd have to prove the wave came in."

The phone went *cling-a-ling-a-ling*. I ignored it. I did not want to release Doris' hand. Above all, I did not want to talk with Emil.

Cling-a-ling-a-ling!

I went wearily.

"Hello! Honolulu *Telegram*."

"You there, Westerfield?"

I caught the voice of Wilks, the city editor, showing signs of recovery but still groggy.

"Yes, and you should be here, shouldering your own responsibilities," I bellowed at him.

"No more *luaus*," he said solemnly. "Had some raw fish with coconut sauce. . . . Severe case of ptomaine poisoning. . . . But, look here, I've some news for the office—"

"Tell it to somebody else," I shouted. "I'm fired."

"No, listen, you've got to take this down! . . . Word has just come from Pearl Harbor of an extraordinary rise in the tide. Four inches above high water mark. Get that, Westerfield. Four inches."

"I got it," I said grimly, and clicked the receiver.

I turned bitterly to Doris.

"Four inches! Did you hear that? They've marked a sudden rising of the sea. A stupendous, overwhelming avalanche of four inches."

She looked at me uncertainly, then her face lighted.

"Really, Tom, really? So you're not fired, after all. Your tidal wave!" She paused thoughtfully, her voice became awed. "What a coincidence—your tidal wave."

PORTRAIT *of a* TYRANT

By F. R. BUCKLEY

IT HAS been contended, and quite plausibly, that Peter von Hagenbach is the original of Gessler in the William Tell legend; but whether or not, certainly he has claims to the title of arch-tyrant in an age which furnishes outstanding examples of the type, even though he had not, like Louis XI, who kept a cardinal fourteen years in a cage too small for him; or like the Count of Charolais, who literally wiped a city from the face of the earth, the advantage of being a crowned prince.

He was, in fact, a bastard, compensatorily provided with a post at the court of the Duke of Burgundy; who at that time happened to have become quite bald. Most of the courtiers shaved their heads and thus kept their sovereign in countenance; but some vain persons, preferring hair to favor, retained their locks. Peter von Hagenbach began his rise to fame by posting himself at the palace gates with barber tools, and forcibly shaving every one that entered.

Obviously, then, he was the very man to govern Alsace and other territories then in pawn to the duke. These lands were in disorder; and Hagenbach proceeded to restore regularity and law to them by the

same direct action as he had exemplified in the hair cutting episode.

First, the roads must be made safe for travelers; he solved the problem of how to tell robbers from honest citizens by hanging a percentage of all passers-by, and trusting to the law of averages. Mathematics also figured in his clarification of the finances of Mulhausen; and when the inhabitants protested his results, he cut off the town's supplies of food. Having refused the local nobles permission to hunt, he descended on the poor with a terrific tax on corn, wine and meat; and when the town of Thann refused payment, had its four principal citizens beheaded without trial.

He brought the duke down to hear the inhabitants of Brisach supersede their old oath of loyalty with another which converted them into slaves; and celebrated this action of submission by turning loose on the city a thousand Walloons with full privileges of plunder and rapine.

He amused himself, in several towns, by summoning fifty of the most respectable women, and seeing whether their husbands could recognize them as they stood in the marketplace, naked but with their heads covered. He was struck with the beauty of a young nun; and, when her parents removed her from his reach, had the public crier announce that she must be returned and delivered to him, on pain of death. After which he chose to be married, amid revels and debaucheries which shocked even his own followers, in that very town of Thann, which he had so recently forced into near starvation.

On April 11th, 1474, he ordered all male inhabitants of Brisach to work in the fosses—to strengthen the defenses of their city against one Sigismund, who was coming to their relief. The irony of which situation—added to the knowledge of what would happen to their wives and daughters while they were absent—was too much for the men of Brisach. They revolted; were joined by German soldiers to whom Hagenbach had refused certain back pay; seized the tyrant, and threw him into jail so heavily loaded with chains that when he was called before a tribunal representing all the towns he had governed, he was unable to walk, and had to be dragged through the streets on a barrow. Around him the freed inhabitants, now under protection of the Roman emperor, surged by thousands; shrieking their joy and hatred, and covering their victim with filth; and he smiled at them.

Before the trial, during it, and again after he had been condemned to death, Hagenbach was put to the ordinary and extraordinary tortures; during which he ceased to smile, but also failed to cry out or denounce any one. And when, having been degraded by one of the emperor's heralds in the midst of a torch lighted crowd that howled "Judas! Judas!", he was at last beheaded, he was smiling again.

"Yet the head which is shown at Colmar," says Michelet, "if indeed it be the head of Hagenbach—that red haired, hideous head with the teeth ground together—certainly expresses nothing so much as the obstinacy of despair and the foretaste of damnation."

CAPTAIN FOX ELTON of the American Military Intelligence was on his way from Paris to neutral Switzerland—posing as a buyer of watches, but instructed to penetrate the German spy nest of Count Kulm at Geneva. Von Kulm, in his great château overlooking Lake Geneva, pretended to be a sort of pacifist who had fled war ridden Germany for the quiet peace of the Alps. He captured the admiration of the Swiss by his extravagant philanthropy. He won the bitter hatred of the French and American Secret Service because of his exasperating success. He apparently could not be killed or outwitted.

The audacious Von Kulm, surrounded by a bodyguard of men and a bevy of sophisticated women, trapped French and American operatives into his own service. Already Captain Farnham of the American Army had been forced to mail Von Kulm's letters through the American consulate at Geneva, uncensored—letters dictated by Von Kulm's flunky, Monsieur Za—which contained invisible ink ciphers beneath their harmless looking messages. Señora Quarraza, of the Von Kulm household, had been used to involve Farnham with Señor Quarraza; the señor challenged Farnham to a duel. The fugitive ex-khedive of Egypt had been employed to trick Farnham into a gambling debt which he could never pay. Then, for extricating Farnham from these dishonorable difficulties, it had been simple for Von Kulm to demand the use of Farnham's official mailing privilege.

There was nothing for Farnham to do except promise to mail the German spy's letters indefinitely. Though Farnham was at the mercy of the German spy net, he consoled himself with the knowledge

Continuing

The SPY NET

A Novel of the Secret Agents of the World War

By ARED WHITE

that at least one of them had tricked him reluctantly. Though Señora Quarraza was a common adventuress, her companion, Mademoiselle Le Rivet, was a lady of quality. Farnham had a vague hope that Mademoiselle Le Rivet would allow him at least to explain to the American Army, some day, how he had become an apparent traitor to his country.

Meanwhile Elton was on his way to Switzerland with orders for Farnham's return to France. Such orders would certainly precipitate matters. . . .

CHAPTER IX

NIMBLE FINGERS

OF THE seven passengers jammed in the stuffy second class compartment of the Paris-Bellegarde Express, Fox Elton alone seemed impervious to the suffocating heat and grimy dust as the train swept across the parched farm lands and vineyards of southern France toward the Swiss frontier. Elton had early classified his fellow passengers as Swiss tradesmen, on their way home from business trips to Paris, London or Madrid, and had dismissed them from his mind.

While they exchanged bilious grievance against the heat, the dust, and a senseless war that demoralized train service, restricted food supply and visited other dire discomforts upon innocent neutrals, Elton sat with his eyes glued in the pages of a small pocket testament of the kind distributed by American welfare workers overseas. Occasionally he smiled in-

wardly as the others speculated guardedly upon the enigma of his preoccupation.

A man from the tropics, one whispered, else he would not be so indifferent to heat and dust. A minister of the gospel, a missionary most likely, else he would not sit with his eyes in a Bible all day when there were agreeable folks to talk to.

Elton left them to their own surmises. He had better use for his time than to waste it in empty discourse with casual travelers. As for the stifling heat and irritating dust, such inconvenience gave him excellent training in self-discipline. It would be an achievement to sit through that long, sweltering haul wholly unruffled and undisturbed. As for the testament, he had the best of reasons for wishing to familiarize himself with the phrasing of the first ninety-nine pages of that book. Later, such a knowledge was to stand him in good stead, he thought; afford him his one means of communicating with the world outside of Switzerland. Therefore he could not know too well where readily to locate certain words and phrases in his diminutive Bible.

The slanting sun of late afternoon was beating in through the compartment window when Elton felt a vagrant wisp of cool air at his cheek. The Swiss caught the token at the same instant and were stirred into a more cheerful animation.

"Ah, the breath of the Alps, at last," said one of them. "Mont Blanc sends greetings and in another hour we shall be in Bellegarde."

The train began toiling into the uplands of the frontier region. An occasional stream trickled under the tracks; the hills and swales were dotted now by thickets of scrub oak and clusters of pine; the sun was tempered by breezes that had wandered far afield from the icy peaks of the Alps. The joy of the Swiss at these welcome signs of their own frontier was replaced shortly by fresh complaint. The war again. They must leave the train at Bellegarde, display their passports, and board a nondescript shuttle train to Annemasse, thence transfer again to the tram into Geneva. Even innocent and well meaning neutrals must suffer gross inconvenience because of French suspicion, they grumbled. Just as though German spies could not cross the frontier at will on Lake Geneva where its southern shores skirted France for many miles.

At Bellegarde Elton gave personal attention to the transfer of his baggage. Ordinarily he traveled with all his effects in an Army musette bag slung across his shoulder. But now, in addition to a large leather bag with his immediate effects, he had along a large wardrobe trunk which carried half a dozen suits of civilian clothes for use on various occasions, formal or informal. His effects and his passports were accepted without question by the French. Mr. Fox Elton, American, buyer of jewelry, age twenty-six, unmarried, length of stay in Switzerland three months, subject to extension. It was stamped by unquestionable French authority.

On reaching Annemasse, port of entry at the immediate frontier, Elton did not present his passports immediately. Since there were some two hundred people to be passed from the train, he took advantage of the delay to explore briefly about the rambling little French village that marked the junction of France with Switzerland. But he did not get far. Despite its size, Annemasse bristled with gendarmes, French secret police in civilian clothes, bayoneted *poilus*, all on the alert for any one attempting to leave or enter France except through the official door. A painstaking vigil, Elton estimated, since French houses lined the little stream, perhaps twenty feet across, that separated the two countries.

The shadow of the hills was seeping into the flat country around Annemasse and the last rays of the sun were visible only in an opalescent glow on the white crest of the highest peaks as Elton crossed into Switzerland and boarded an electric car for the heart of Geneva—a scene whose majestic beauty hushed even the most garrulous of the travelers and cast a spell of awed silence over them. Elton turned from the Alpine sunset with an effort.

His eyes searched out carefully the lay of that invisible line that was the deadline between two great countries, one neutral, the other at war. He wondered whether the French were sure of all who lived in Annemasse, sure of all who occupied houses that thrust their walls sheer against the forbidden portals of Switzerland there and along the French shores of Lake Geneva. Small wonder, he thought, that Switzerland was the Mecca of the German secret service, the rendezvous of its greatest spy center.

He arranged for the delivery of his trunk to the Beau Rivage, then took a tram across Geneva to the Rue du Mont Blanc where he transferred to a horsecab, crossed the bridge to the Grand Quai and made inquiry of the last steamer leaving up the lake for Lausanne. On finding that he had until midnight, he engaged the cab until that hour and gave instructions to the driver that he be driven to the principal points of night interest.

Although he had expected to be kept under observation from the moment of passing the frontier at Annemasse, the celerity with which a shadow actually attached itself to his trail stirred Elton agreeably. He surmised that the shadow must be of the German secret service, since the Swiss police would have no possible occasion for suspecting him, in view of his excellent passports. The ease with which he had been able to spot the shadow offered him the conclusion that the fellow was by no means a skilful operative, a fact that led to the further deduction that he was being observed merely because he was a suspicious stranger in Switzerland, and with no hint of his real identity and mission.

With several hours on his hands, Elton drove about the more prominent streets. The brilliant street illuminations were exhilarating after the drab shaded lights of war ridden France with their morbid green glow. But his random drive about Geneva was not for his own amusement. He was busy checking the lay of the streets, their names and intersections, the location of such points of international repute as the Kursaal, the Casino, the Beau Rivage and the lake promenades.

SHORTLY before eleven o'clock he had the cabman let him out at the Genevoise on the Rue de Chantepoulet, intent upon a closeup of the shadow who had been dogging his trail all evening. He entered the tavern, found a seat in a far corner, ordered a glass of light wine, and sat observing the patrons as they entered. Ten minutes elapsed before his shadow followed him in. Elton's practised eye identified the fellow immediately by the exaggerated air of detachment with which he found a table and busied himself with the menu card.

The shadow was a somewhat puzzling type. Undersized, trim, lithe and distinctly Russian of feature. He was a man of perhaps thirty, swarthy of skin, with small dull black eyes, deepset and muddy under thin irregular brows. The forehead was bulging, the jaw undershot, the mouth thick, pouty and treacherous. A criminal type, Elton thought, suggestive of the pickpocket or jackal order of petty crooks. Probably one of the minor leg men of the Imperial German service, employed as a pickup man working out of Annemasse.

Elton took the fellow's measure, finished his glass of *meursault* and returned to the waiting cab. Since he had no present desire to escape his shadow, he drove straight to the Grand Quai, where he dismissed the cab, strolled leisurely across the English gardens to the lake promenade and boarded his steamer a few minutes before it pulled out. He placed his hand baggage in his stateroom and left, without locking the door, to find a chair on the forward deck. The deck chairs were shortly filled with passengers for Lausanne, the glamour of the moonlit night on Lake Geneva permitting no one thoughts of sleep.

The Alps rose in ghostly grandeur above the shadows of night, their peaks silhouetted, gray-white, clearcut as cameos

against the deep blue sky and mirrored in the deep placid bowl of the lake. Passengers, even those who came aboard in groups of two and three, sat in awed silence. Elton found himself under the spell, but presently shook his mind back into the world of grim realities that had brought him to Switzerland. The lay of the lake rather than its incomparable beauty, he reminded himself, must hold his interest.

He had taken his shore bearings on coming aboard and he held them with the aid of lights in the distance as the steamer slipped on its way. An hour put them off the lights of what must be Coppet, on the west shore. Coppet lay in Switzerland. But across the lake to his right hand was now the soil of France. A France that emerged from the lake itself to claim the south shores, where the lake turns to the east, as far as St. Gingolph, nearly a score of miles away.

The silence was broken from time to time by a wheezy shriek from the steamer as it signaled some small craft off its course. Elton caught the glimpse of an occasional gray shadow, a motorboat or sail, plying the lake, now in France, now in Swiss waters. He smiled grimly at the suggestion these craft brought to his mind. How many of them, he wondered, conveyed spy runners, spy messages, secret operatives from the shores of France? Not even a cordon of armed *poilus*, thrown out as skirmishers at regulation intervals across the whole waterfront of France, could stanch such a leak. It could only remain a game of French wits against German cunning, an endless prowling of mysterious night craft, intermittent, sharp clashes of gunfire as prying craft came upon their quarry. It was by this route the faithful Walters must come in the guise of deserter, without passport or credentials. And as he saw first hand the broad gray expanses of the lake, he had no doubt that Walters would thread his way safely through the troubled waters.

Elton had appeared wholly unconscious of those about him, of an occasional movement from forward deck aft. A thin voice very close to him addressed him in labored French.

"Will monsieur please a light for me," the man seated close beside him asked.

Elton had been conscious of the fact that the fellow had been striking one match after another in an effort to light a cigaret, only to have them extinguished by the rush of the boat. He caught the features clearly. The little man of the Russian face who had followed him into the Genevoise. He had been expecting the man, but had not noted the maneuver that had placed the shadow in the chair beside him. Elton obligingly took the cigar he was smoking and leaned over to hold it for the man's cigaret. The fellow leaned forward and puffed fire into his cigaret, then sank back in his chair with a muttered thanks.

A few minutes later the shadow arose, stretched himself nonchalantly and left the deck. Elton folded his arms and felt of his inner pocket. A letter bearing his confidential instructions as to his conduct in Switzerland was gone. The semblance of a smile passed his lips.

"I made no mistake," he thought, "when I set that rascal down as a pickpocket—and a mighty nimble one he is."

When the steamer docked at Ouchy, landing place for Lausanne, Elton returned to his stateroom. As he entered, his eyes fell upon an envelop on the floor beside his handgrip. He picked it up eagerly. It was the letter that had been stolen from his pocket, its contents intact. His eyes glowed with satisfaction. Return of the envelop to the floor of his stateroom meant that Elton was expected to believe he had dropped it there by accident. It meant that the Russian of the nimble fingers was flattering himself that he had escaped his victim's observation.

Elton hurried ashore and crossed into Lausanne, which was soundly asleep under the brooding shadows of Mont Jorat. He sought out a hotel near the Gare Centrale, left instructions that he was to be called for the late forenoon express to Berne, and upon locking himself in his room examined

his handgrip with painstaking care. So deft were the fingers that had opened it aboard the steamer that Elton was able to verify the fact with difficulty. A pocketbook containing two hundred Swiss francs in small currency and silver had not been molested. But a slight disarrangement of certain carefully arranged personal effects told the story. He used a strong glass in examining a sealed envelop. The seal had been broken and then restored expertly. That envelop contained the instructions for Captain Farnham's transfer from Switzerland back to Paris.

He turned to bed in high fettle. The Prussian secret service had tricked him of his orders before he had been in Switzerland overnight.

CHAPTER X

SPIDER WEBS

IT WAS nearing midday when the leisurely Berne express delivered Elton at the Swiss metropolis after a pleasant ride through the picturesque Swiss countryside from Lausanne. His departure from Lausanne late in the morning had been attended by a brand new shadow, a fat, moon faced man of Teuton mold whose clumsy technique had betrayed him to Elton as he left the hotel after breakfast. On alighting at Berne, Elton hurried into the Bubenberg-Platz, hailed a taxicab and drove off with such expedition that his sluggish shadow all but lost track of him in the crowds.

In Berne Elton quickly sensed a very different realm from that of Geneva, or even Lausanne. Berne was as distinctly German, in all outward appearances, as Geneva was French. The faces on the sidewalk were largely Teutonic, station attendants spoke in German, the streets bore difficult names—Spitalgasse, Marktgasse, Framgasse, and finally Gerechtigkeitsgasse, a thoroughfare into which the taxicab swung on the way to the American legation, Elton's immediate destination.

He was received at the legation by a stooped, anemic young under-secretary who had assimilated an annoying set of grandiose diplomatic mannerisms. In the absence of the *chargé d'affaires*, who had gone early to lunch, the assistant made the most of the interview. When he had read Elton's orders through with an impressive solemnity, he arose, cast an apprehensive look about the room, directed Elton to an inner sanctum and closed the door carefully.

"I'm sorry," he complained. "Most terribly sorry that the Army is sending officers disguised as civilians to Switzerland on such trivial errands. Such a blunder is certain to lead to uncomfortable embarrassments if the German legation should get wind of your military status. They'd lose no time in lodging complaint with the Swiss that America was violating neutrality regulations."

Elton smiled easily and lighted a cigaret.

"I'm not guilty of deceiving the Germans on that score," he said innocently. "I've already let them steal a complete file of my orders—and of Captain Farnham's."

The legation secretary's face was stricken by horror.

"You—you can't mean it?" he stammered incredulously.

"I thought it good business," said Elton. "It will save them from prying about too much in my private affairs while I'm out contracting for Swiss watches and things."

"You've made a colossal blunder, my dear man," cried the secretary. His emotions outgrew his chair and he walked the floor in agitation. "We shall have to ask for your recall instantly—as soon as possible, before the Germans lodge complaint."

"You'll address your complaint to the commander of the Army?" Elton inquired.

"Of course, of course," chattered the secretary. "I'm taking the responsibility of an immediate wire to your headquarters asking your relief—before—before the German legation complains to the Swiss government. So far, dear fellow,

the American legation has gotten away with clean skirts through the insufferable mess here in Berne."

"Thank you. You're doing me a great service," said Elton. "You see, I didn't want to leave Paris in the first place and if you get me sent back, I'll be grateful."

The secretary drew himself up in all his dignity, his eyes blazing.

"A shabby way of working it, upon my word!" he said with withering scorn. "You may be assured that we shall be most pleased to be rid of you out of Switzerland."

"Thank you again, sir," said Elton. "But until I'm relieved by competent authority, I suppose I'll have to stay around. I'll be at the Bellevue-Palace for a day or two if you want to reach me. And in the meantime, sir, if you'll be good enough to have your consul at Geneva notify Farnham that he's been relieved for return to Paris, you'll be rid of Farnham too."

"I shall do so at once," snapped the secretary, bowing a frigid dismissal. "Good day, sir."

Elton left the legation in high good humor at the developments there. An American protest to Army headquarters against his presence in Switzerland was very much to his liking at the present moment. Such a protest, in course of official routine, would find its way to the desk of Colonel Rand and come to naught. But in the meantime it was reasonably certain to catch the sensitive ears of the German secret service and thus strengthen Elton's masquerade as a harmless Army purchasing agent, a mere replacement for the hapless Captain Farnham.

He drove at once to the Bellevue-Palace Hotel and entered that international trysting place with a slightly rising pulse. In the celebrated Red Room of that luxurious hostelry he was to try for his first contact with the French military intelligence. An open meeting with an assistant attaché of the French legation, in uniform, who reserved a small table on designated days at which to gain contact with agents sent to Berne by Lieutenant d'Auteuil, executive officer at Paris headquarters. The French theory was plausible enough. Since the German shadows were everywhere, they were best foiled by open frankness. Such a maneuver saved the French a fixed rendezvous, which would have been spotted promptly, as would any one calling at the French legation, or attempting secret contact with the French attachés.

In accordance with the detailed instructions D'Auteuil had given him, Elton entered the Red Room in the manner of a stranger who has neither appointment nor table reservation. He was seated alone at a small table by an obsequious head waiter and, without looking about him, consulted the menu with certain inconspicuous mannerisms that were intended to identify his presence to the French attaché. The response was immediate.

"My dear monsieur, I am delighted!"

He arose at sight of a young French officer standing over his table with extended hand. Elton rose and grasped the hand, instantly adapting himself to the Frenchman's friendly manner. He caught the insignia of rank on the officer's sleeve.

"This is a most unexpected pleasure, indeed, my dear Captain," exclaimed Elton.

They stood exchanging pleasantries for several moments, seemingly two friends who had met by accident, until Elton motioned the Frenchman to a place at his table.

"But no, monsieur," objected the captain. "Since I am stationed in Berne as attaché of the French legation, this is my home and you must be my guest. Besides, I have already placed my order for luncheon."

ELTON followed the Frenchman across the room to his table, a table for two that was set somewhat apart. During the exchange of pleasantries each had checked the other's identity with covert signs of the secret service and though the

Frenchman clearly had accepted him, it puzzled Elton that he made no effort, in the course of luncheon, to broach the subject that must have been uppermost in his mind. The Frenchman introduced himself by a subtle indirection.

"Madame Lareaux will be interested to hear that you are in Berne," he said.

"It is gracious of madame to remember your old friend, Captain Elton," Elton replied in kind.

Captain Lareaux displayed a quick discomfort at mention of military rank. Twice before he had broken in with some light expression when Elton had attempted to veer the conversation into serious channels. Lareaux now looked across the room with a certain ingenious indication that he was directing Elton's attention toward a point of danger. Shortly afterward Elton looked about. Facing them, across the room, was a somber, square faced Teuton in civilian clothes. The face was decidedly phlegmatic and with no suggestion of a very high order of intelligence. The type of a petty clerk, Elton thought, and wondered at his presence in the Red Room, habitat of ministers, attachés, world adventurers who came there to talk, look or listen. Certainly not an operative to cause concern, if Elton was any judge.

"I suppose your firm has sent you here on a business mission of some sort," said Captain Lareaux. "You will be in Berne for very long?"

"I'm here to buy watches, compasses, and perhaps instruments for artillery sights," replied Elton frankly. "You see, I've taken on with the Army since you last saw me, and I'm over here incognito on a buying expedition."

Lareaux's keen face flushed and his blue eyes flashed a quick rebuke.

"Pardon, monsieur," he rejoined hastily. "But as a French attaché it is better that I should not know of such things!"

"But I thought perhaps you would be able to advise me, my dear Captain," persisted Elton. "Where are the best manufacturers who may be depended upon to deliver goods in great quantity?"

"I regret!" said Lareaux sharply. "Swiss neutrality is a very delicate thing—and besides it is unethical for me to meddle in such matters as that."

"My mission seems in no better favor with our own legation," said Elton. "I just had a lecture there, and a warning that I might find myself sent back to France."

The Frenchman shrugged an eloquent end to the subject. His precaution was sharply puzzling to Elton. Many things might have been said in a low tone without possibility of carrying to another table. The waiters in the Red Room were forbidden to hover over their guests, and appeared only when they were wanted. Elton remembered the warning of D'Auteuil, that the Red Room was a safer place in which to chat than some secret rendezvous. There was one bit of important information he must have from Lareaux. It was for that information he had come to the Red Room. He hesitated to force the issue, in view of the Frenchman's unusual show of a guarded tongue. Yet he made up his mind to put the question bluntly if necessary.

But Captain Lareaux, a moment later, made it plain that official business was to have its innings a bit later.

"You have never been in Berne before?" he inquired.

"My first visit," said Elton. "It seems a very pleasant place in which to fight the war."

"If you are not immediately engaged," said Lareaux casually, "my car is at your disposal this afternoon, or any afternoon this week you may wish it. I will be glad to drive you about and show you the wonders of Berne."

Elton's smile was spontaneous at this significant invitation.

"I accept gladly," he said. "I had planned on going about in a sight seeing omnibus, but your generous offer is far more appealing."

Captain Lareaux's car was waiting for him at the curb when they left the Bellevue Palace, a car with the legation

insignia on the tonneau and driven by a pinched young Frenchman in civilian clothes. The Frenchman pointed to the great peaks rising in the distance, tolling them off one at a time with his finger. But it was not of the Alps that he spoke.

"We are, of course, being closely followed," he said. "I must make a good show of pointing out the places of interest —for your own good."

"Being shadowed is no new experience," said Elton. "The Boche picked me up at Annemasse and haven't let me out of sight an instant since then."

"Of course," said Lareaux. "They do as much for all strangers. But you do not appreciate, my Captain, the importance they now appear to fasten to your presence. You have today been accorded a rare honor by their secret service."

"You mean they shadowed me at the Red Room?"

"The man against whom I tried so hard to warn you, my dear Captain."

Elton brought that stolid face of the Red Room back before his mind's eye and searched it, a trick of memory that enabled him to visualize every detail. He only confirmed his first estimate, a mere petty worker, a dummox. The man's face was not that of a clever man or even of a cunning one.

"Of all the shadows I've ever had to deal with, I thought that fellow looked the most dumb," Elton said with a laugh.

THE CAR stopped in front of the Bundeshaus. Lareaux's eyes were fixed on the imposing old structure rising on massive walls at the edge of precipitous cliffs. His finger pointed successively to the great fountain, the huge figures of bronze that guarded its portals, the rambling stone wings. But his pointing finger had nothing to do with his speech.

"A dumb animal without doubt, Captain," Lareaux said evenly. "But one whose ears reach across a crowded room, into the most private and guarded conversation. He can hear the slightest whisper at twenty yards or more, and therefore there is no more dangerous operative in the German secret service. A dumb mute with an ability to read accurately what the lips say even when they barely move. *Voilà!*"

Elton swallowed hard. A German trick of which he had had no suspicion. He saw its dire possibilities—in the Red Room where diplomats gathered informally and discussed grave matters of international concern. His mind raced through his own remarks to Lareaux. Luckily he had taken his cue from the Frenchman's reticence.

"Thank you for the warning," he replied heartily. "I'm afraid I might have fallen into that trap."

"But are you certain, my Captain, that you did not say too much?" Lareaux pressed him. "Of your military status?"

"On the contrary, what I said luckily confirms what the Boche already know," said Elton. "I saw to it that they got my orders as quickly as possible, which is information I want them to have."

"I am glad," said Lareaux with a sigh of relief. "I appreciate, monsieur, if you were not deemed a gentleman of great discretion, D'Auteuil would not have sent you to talk with me. Will you please state in what way I may serve you?"

"Yes," said Elton at once. "It is important, Captain Lareaux, that I have the identity and rendezvous of the operative in charge at Geneva."

The car was moving again, along the sandstone heights above the Aare. Lareaux lolled back in the cushions, lighted a cigaret and sat wrapped in deep thought. Presently he sat up with a quick movement.

"I regret, monsieur," he said decisively, "but what you ask—it is impossible."

"I was assured," Elton persisted crisply, "that I could count upon the utmost help in solving a very difficult and dangerous problem, Captain Lareaux. Your Colonel Ourq gave assurance through D'Auteuil that no stone would be put in my way."

Lareaux turned the conversation back

to Berne. They were passing the Zeitglockenturn, seven centuries ago the west gate of the ancient city. The car swung to the east into the lower town, the Frenchman dilating upon the historic landmarks with the abstraction of a man who speaks of one thing and thinks intently of another.

"But the problem—it is solved," he announced suddenly. "You may accept my word for that, monsieur! It remains only for a most critical decision to be carried out, and for that we must use the greatest caution."

"I am not wholly without caution, Captain Lareaux, as your service in Paris has plainly indicated," Elton said pointedly.

"Pardon, monsieur, but I had no such thought," Lareaux rejoined quickly. "It is that the German secret service in Switzerland is guided by the devilish brain of an intellectual monster. You who have just come cannot understand the danger, monsieur."

The Frenchman sat bolt upright and faced Elton for the first time. He spoke rapidly, intently, his hands emphasizing his words with convulsive gestures.

"If there is such a thing as a German superman, it is this Prussian spymaster," Lareaux went on. "Or I should say that he is a super devil. A colossal genius, carried by a body that is without heart or bowels or mercy. He ruins or destroys men without compunction, monsieur. Of that we have ample cause to know. But such is his devilish cunning that he makes a jest of Swiss neutrality. Until very lately, monsieur, even my own legation wondered if he were not a myth, a figment of the war imagination. Then, miraculously, we came upon the astounding truth."

"You have learned very definitely, then, just where the German secret service has its roots and rendezvous?" Elton prompted when Lareaux lapsed into silence.

"Ah, but its roots are everywhere," Lareaux responded. "In the ministries, the legations, the consulates, in the Red Room, the Bundeshaus, on Lake Geneva, in the villages that lead to Italy and Austria. From these places its tentacles reach out over the world with their poisonous intrigue, stirring revolts in the colonies, trapping powerful leaders of neutral and Allied opinion, spying upon our armies and navies. A powerful organization, monsieur, and yet it hangs by a single thread—the evil genius of the man who conceived and built it, and who directs from cover its every movement like some hideous spider that has woven a web."

Lareaux leaned close to Elton and added in a vibrant undertone:

"To destroy the web of a spider, monsieur, it is necessary that you destroy the spider. When the intelligence that directs the Prussian web is done for, the thing will fall of its own weight, and we can trap a thousand stupid henchmen like so many witless flies."

"Your plan, then, Captain Lareaux," said Elton in a level voice, "is to kill the Count Kulm."

The Frenchman started violently and fixed Elton with wildly staring eyes.

"*Sacrebleu, monsieur!*" he gasped. "But where did you hear that name?"

"The purpose that brought me to Switzerland, Captain," said Elton quietly. "Can you not see now how necessary it is that I contact your agent at Geneva—so that we will not work to cross purposes?"

Captain Lareaux debated with himself for several moments, twisting uneasily in his seat and nervously stroking one hand with the other.

"I am sworn, monsieur," he said at last, "to reveal to no one, not even the French *chargé d'affaires*, the identity of the French agent who will deal with Von Kulm. But—" Lareaux hesitated before he added in a guarded whisper—"but during the minute that follows eight-twenty-two o'clock, at the tables of the Café du Nord at Geneva, there will be French eyes that will understand the gestures that identified you today, monsieur, at the Red Room. It will be for them to decide whether they wish to address you."

CHAPTER XI

THE RED OATH

ON THE second morning following his unhappy pact with the persuasive Monsieur Za, Captain Edward Farnham was aroused from his sleep at the Beau Rivage by a noisy jangling of his telephone.

"A person who wishes to see monsieur," said a voice from the hotel office apologetically.

"What name?" Farnham demanded.

"He present no name," said the clerk. "I much regret to disturb monsieur—but the person is most persistent. A matter of importance, he says, monsieur."

"All right," groaned Farnham. "But it better be important!"

The tap at the door startled Farnham slightly. It was the tap that was to identify Monsieur Za when he came with letters. Farnham responded to find an undersized man with a warped, wizened Russian face. The visitor lost no time in making known his business.

"I am the messenger of Monsieur Za," he said in very poor French, speaking in a thin, squeaky voice that blended with his person. "I am come to say for Monsieur Za that the Captain Farnham will please wait at his room until monsieur call this morning."

"Do you mean you got me out of bed—"

But the little visitor did not tarry for the rebuke. Having delivered his message, he was gone. Farnham closed the door and pondered. Za had called no later than midnight, to receive from Farnham a number of those innocuous little letters addressed to various persons in France. He had said that he would return at nine this morning with the letters typed and ready for Farnham to mail at the American consulate in Geneva.

It was now a few minutes after seven o'clock, and though the mysterious messenger had given no indication of whether Monsieur Za would call earlier than planned, or sometime after nine, Farnham decided to heed the message and stay in his room. He dressed at his leisure and ordered breakfast sent up to him, rather a hearty breakfast for one in the distressing dilemma in which he had been placed as a result of his indiscretions at the château of Von Kulm.

Farnham had barely finished his breakfast when Za arrived, a few minutes before eight o'clock, with him a stranger whom he introduced as Monsieur Bolin. Farnham was puzzled by something vaguely familiar in the name.

"The gentleman," said Monsieur Za with an insinuating smile, "the gentleman whose name it is most important when appended to a check for many, many Swiss francs."

Za's words supplied Farnham's memory. The name that had appeared on the check of forty-two thousand francs, Farnham's losses at poker with Abbas Hilmi. Bolin's face compelled Farnham's attention; it was an unusual face, well formed, aquiline, strong of feature, with boring, cynical black eyes and an almost leering smile that seemed to be indelibly stamped on his features.

Farnham arranged chairs for them with an effort at nonchalance that failed to cover his uneasiness.

"Your letters are ready for the mails," said Za, opening a leather briefcase and laying out a small pile of neatly typed missives, each written on a large white sheet of paper under the letterhead of the Beau Rivage. "When you have signed them, we have a matter of much interest to you."

Farnham took the letters to the desk, inspected them minutely, shook his head in perplexity, and signed and sealed them. Then he placed the sealed letters in an inner pocket of his coat and turned to his visitors.

"It may prove of interest to you, dear Captain, to know that you are leaving Switzerland immediately," said Za, with a repetition of his cat-like smile.

"What do you mean?" Farnham demanded bluntly, looking uneasily from one to the other.

"An officer of your Army has been sent

to relieve you, a Captain Fox Elton of your Engineers," said Za. "He brings orders to your legation at Berne sending you back to Paris for duty."

As Farnham sat staring blankly at him, Za took a typed copy of Elton's orders from his pocket. There was a softening of the taut lines about the American's mouth, a quick light in his eyes as he read.

"Back to Paris, eh?" he commented without looking up. "I have heard nothing of this and have no such orders."

"Ah, but the idea, it is most pleasant, yes?" leered Za. "Well, my Captain, the orders are authentic enough." The feline smile expanded in self satisfaction. "Monsieur Za is in a position to know what goes on in Switzerland. Your captain he arrives only last night at Annemasse, and hurries on to Lausanne where he take the train for Berne. Your orders, my Captain, already are they in the hands of your American *chargé d'affaires*."

"Well, what of it," said Farnham blandly. He gave a dry smile. "I can't say that it's going to be very painful to leave this place for Paris, eh?"

"*Bien, monsieur*," rejoined Za. "But whether you leave Switzerland, it depend on much more than your orders. It is upon that matter Monsieur Bolin and I have called to see you this morning."

Farnham sat erect and his eyes snapped.

"Don't get the idea, because of what happened," he blazed, "that I'm going to tolerate any further interference in my private and official affairs."

Za gave an indifferent shrug and turned to his associate. Bolin took from his pocketbook the canceled check for forty-two thousand francs, Farnham's receipt for the check, and one of the letters to Paris that Farnham had signed the day before. He held them before Farnham's puzzled eyes for a moment and returned them to his pocketbook.

"These are to refresh monsieur's memory," said Bolin, fixing Farnham with his taunting eyes and speaking in a crisp, incisive voice. "Now let us put aside all pretense and speak with the utmost frankness, monsieur, since in no other way can we arrive at a conclusion."

"Say what you have to .y," said Farnham coldly. "But see to t that you do not impose too far upon my patience!"

"First, monsieur," said Bolin serenely, "let me test your patience by saying bluntly that the documents I just presented are proof conclusive that you are in the pay of the Imperial German secret service."

FARNHAM sprang to his feet in a surge of passion and shook a warning fist at Bolin and Za.

"So this is blackmail!" he raged. "Out of my room this instant, you worthless scoundrels, or I'll march you to the gendarmes!"

The two looked back at him with easy amusement, wholly unmoved by his outbreak.

"Please calm yourself, monsieur," said Bolin softly. "You are far too intelligent a man to wish an American court-martial—with an American firing squad at the end of the trail."

The masterly assurance in which Bolin said this caught Farnham and cooled his passion. His hand went slowly back to his side. He stood through several moments of tense indecision, then sat down, the muscles of his face working convulsively.

"Well?" he demanded.

"Bravo, monsieur!" Bolin beamed. "Now that you have your wits, let me make clear the force of what I've said. Foremost, the check is notoriously, as you would put it, the check of the Imperial German government. But as Monsieur Za is an accredited attaché of the Austrian legation, and I am officially attached to the German legation, no harm can come to us, as you must see. You will hardly deny that you presented the check at the Swiss bank, nor will you deny your signature to certain letters to France, the precise nature of which might interest either an American or French military court."

"But you forget that I paid the money

to Abbas Hilmi, and can prove how I came to owe it?" Farnham protested stoutly.

Bolin very deliberately cut the end from a cigar and lighted it.

"Quite to the contrary, dear Captain," said Bolin, "you can prove nothing. His Highness would testify that he had never in his life laid eyes upon you, whereas it would become the very unhappy duty of Monsieur Za and me to give our version of why you were paid forty-two thousand Swiss francs—out of the secret funds of our government, monsieur!"

Farnham sat looking at Bolin for a long time out of stark eyes, the blood gone from his face, his mouth taut and drawn. His whole appearance was that of a man who has found himself suddenly, deftly trapped, beyond the hope of escape. He did not thresh about or fly into a rage. The two secret agents watched the working of his features, breathlessly, with glittering eyes. Bolin's right hand rested in his coat pocket, ready to meet possible violence with fire, since there was no knowing how the victim might react to the trap.

In the end Farnham's head dropped forward on his breast, the token of surrender. Bolin and Za exchanged triumphant looks. Their victory was complete. The victim had yielded to the inevitable. Bolin proceeded to strengthen the fetters. For the better part of an hour he spoke, a few sentences at a time, arguing the futility of resistance. They were giving Farnham his only chance. He must do as he was told. They would ask but little of him, nothing but that he receive and send the letters at Paris. He need not know any more than he had known heretofore what those letters meant. He could write them in his own way, put them in the American official mail when they had been typed. He might even have them censored by his commanding officer at Paris.

The American nodded a broken acquiescence, without looking up at them.

"I appear to be in your power, messieurs," Farnham muttered weakly.

"Then, monsieur, we will come to a full understanding," said Bolin. "What is to be done should be done thoroughly, so as to lead to no possible later dispute or distrust. Come!"

The dispirited Farnham merely sat slumped in his chair, without animation or interest. Monsieur Za placed the dispatch case on the American's knees, a highly embossed linen sheet on its top. Farnham's listless eyes saw incoherently that it was done in German, a German secret oath.

"In the noble pigment of the Imperial German secret service!" exclaimed Bolin. He took Farnham's unresisting right arm, rolled the dressing gown and shirt to the sleeve and gave a quick stab of a lancet in the bared vein. Farnham did not flinch at the prick. Za gathered the red globule from the tiny wound into the pen which he placed in the American's hands. Slowly, and with fingers that trembled, Farnham signed his name to the oath in his own blood.

"*Bien, monsieur!*" exclaimed Bolin. "The pact it is complete. Please to remember, monsieur, that each month of your faithful service you shall receive the pay of ten thousand francs."

He paused impressively and added in a voice of warning:

"But at the first treachery, your life it is not worth the one centime, not even if you should hide in the desert of Sahara!"

CHAPTER XII

UNDER A PERISCOPE

UPON being left alone by the two gloating agents of the Imperial German secret service, Captain Farnham sat without moving for the better part of an hour, his face covered by his hands, until he was aroused from his thoughts by an attendant with a telegram. He accepted the message lifelessly, motioned the messenger out of the room, and sat staring at the message some time before he tore it open. The telegram was

from the American legation at Berne and directed tersely:

YOU WILL PROCEED BY FIRST AVAILABLE TRANSPORTATION TO THIS LEGATION ON A MATTER OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE. BRING ALL PERSONAL EFFECTS WITH YOU. ACKNOWLEDGE THIS TELEGRAM IMMEDIATELY.

The sheet of flimsy fluttered from his fingers and he sank back into his despairing pose. Another half hour slipped by, in which he might have been a man asleep. Then he sprang suddenly to his feet, paced the floor of his room excitedly for several minutes, and paused in a certain tragic indecision before his locker trunk. Presently he took from its recesses a small automatic pistol and stood gazing at it morbidly as it lay in the palm of his hand.

Reflectively placing the weapon on the walnut writing desk, he sat down, took up a pen, dipped it several times nervously and began a painstaking message, which he wrote down with great difficulty, a word or two at a time.

At a rap at his door, he covered the pistol hurriedly with several sheets of paper and responded. At the door was Mademoiselle Le Rivet, her face very pale, her large blue eyes staring and fearful. She entered the room quickly, as Farnham stood speechless.

"Monsieur, pardon the intrusion," she gasped. "But I must speak with you a moment."

Farnham drew himself together and bowed stiffly.

"Certainly, mademoiselle," he said icily. "But, really, I am sure you will be pleased to know—"

"Please don't!" she pleaded against the bitter reproach in his voice.

"I was merely going to say," Farnham concluded relentlessly, "that your associates have done their work so well that there is really nothing left for you to say."

"But, monsieur, you have frightened me," she cried.

She crossed the room swiftly, snatched the covering from the pistol and held it behind her while she took up the sheet of paper upon which Farnham had been writing. There were only a few words, scrawled, almost illegible, but Mademoiselle Le Rivet reeled as she confirmed their meaning.

Dear Mother—Please forgive me, but there is no other way. You must always believe—

Mademoiselle faced him with a poignant anguish in her eyes.

"So you really meant to destroy yourself, monsieur?" she said in a low vibrant voice.

"You will pardon me, Mademoiselle Le Rivet," Farnham responded in the same uncompromising voice, "but do you not think it a bit bizarre for you to rush into my apartment, seize my private correspondence and read it before my eyes?" His voice softened disagreeably. "Even a spy should have some regard for a victim's privacy—when he is present, at least."

Mademoiselle winced visibly.

"But, monsieur," she rallied, "was I to stand by and see you take your life?"

"Ah," taunted Farnham, "then you have eyes that see through walls, or was it that your eyes were glued to my keyhole!"

"I will tell you, monsieur," she cried. "I was left behind to watch your actions. Monsieur Bolin was uneasy, and with good reason, that—that you might harm yourself. For what seemed like many hours, monsieur, I have stood with my eyes at the 'scope, in the apartment next to yours, and when I saw your purpose, I came in."

"That was very gracious of you, indeed," Farnham said sardonically. "And now that you have explained this great honor so beautifully, mademoiselle, may I trouble you to replace my—ah—personal property and accept my profound adieu?"

Mademoiselle Le Rivet drew herself together and her eyes snapped sudden defiance.

"I will not go, monsieur!" she said. "Not until you have heard all that I have to say to you."

Farnham seated himself with an annoyed shrug and lighted a cigaret.

"Very well, mademoiselle," he replied. "Then I suppose I am compelled to listen, in the hope that you will not prolong this intrusion unnecessarily."

"You were about to take the easy way out of an unpleasant situation, monsieur," she charged, now more fully self-possessed and striving to speak calmly. "But it is my duty to warn you that the door is closed, too, in that direction."

"I had thought," sneered Farnham, "that a man's soul and his honor were his own affair. "Am I to understand that you Germans claim the gates of hell as well, Mademoiselle Le Rivet?"

"Yes, monsieur," she replied grimly. "If you put it that way. But is it not that you leave some one very dear behind?"

"An unnecessary question, I would say, to one who has pried into my private letters even before the ink was dry."

"Then what you would do is most impossible," she exclaimed. Her hands were locked behind her back, her chin was thrust forward in her struggle to bolster her courage through the interview. "Death would not save you from the disgrace; it would only bring dishonor upon your name and the name of those you love. The reason for your death would be given out to the Swiss, a version in which you would have no word."

Farnham sat staring at her, a new horror in his eyes.

"So that's what you came here for?" he accused. "To tell me that the German Imperial secret service claims me body and soul!"

"But it is not of my doing, monsieur," she cried. "I am only doing my duty by warning you."

"A pleasant lot," Farnham laughed bitterly. "I can vaguely understand why you should trap me, if you had only done it fairly, but it is a fiend lower than the devil that would cast dishonor into the graves of those whom he has driven to death."

The blood was gone from her face again and Mademoiselle Le Rivet was making a supreme struggle to contain herself. Farnham caught this struggle unmistakably, and there came back into his mind her reticence at that first springing of the trap at Von Kulm's château. He knew now that it must not have been mere reticence but revolt, that today she was cast in a rôle that flooded her with horror. Farnham thought he could picture Señora Quarazza gloating at his tragedy, but he wondered if the Spanish woman would have had the courage to face him alone after what had happened.

"You must remember the war, monsieur," Mademoiselle Le Rivet replied in a dry, thin voice that lacked conviction. "There is not you alone to consider, but so many who must be forced to serve our cause, that we must find a way to discourage those who would escape too easily."

"The devil himself would blush at such a profession," rejoined Farnham.

"Perhaps, monsieur."

The words dropped from her parted lips, almost an acceptance of what he had charged. Mademoiselle Le Rivet had lost the struggle with herself, and sank into a chair, her eyes staring and haunted.

"But is there not another place where we can speak of these things?" she pleaded. She cast a frightened look about and added with evident restraint, "Perhaps you would see matters as I see them, if I could but have a breath of—of fresh air while I am convincing you."

There was a note in her voice that conveyed a meaning beyond her words, a wish to be alone, where the walls might not have ears, where she would be free to unleash her unspoken thoughts. Farnham caught her meaning and did not temporize.

"Since I am so completely in your power, mademoiselle," he acquiesced, "I suppose I should do whatever you suggest."

"Thank you," she exclaimed gratefully, and rose to go.

"Since it is so near twelve," Farnham proposed as he got his hat and coat,

"possibly you will want to combine lunch with whatever else you have to say."

She shook her head and placed a warning finger to her lips.

"But I need the open air," she complained. "A turn on the lake if you please."

THEY left the hotel and walked together across the Quai, Farnham's hands thrust deep in the pockets of his coat, his head thrust dejectedly forward, but with a pulse that was rising to the swift change in mademoiselle's attitude. At the boat landing she engaged a rowboat and motioned Farnham to the oars. In a few minutes they were well out of hearing of the Quai.

"The lake alone is deaf in Geneva," she broke the silence. "Ashore there are long ears and sharp eyes everywhere—one dares hardly think. But I must ask, monsieur, that you hear me with more patience, will you not?"

"I am listening, mademoiselle," he said crisply.

"So you will understand my action, monsieur," she said. "Let me say that I am in the service of my country, just as you are in the service of yours. Nor do I serve for pay, nor for glory, since what I do is for the Fatherland—the only way I can help after what has happened."

Farnham sat looking at her coldly, without interruption, his arms busy with the oars that were taking them farther out into the lake.

"My father, a colonel of our hussars, was killed at Mons, monsieur, and my two brothers; and there was left only me to serve against the abominable wolves who tear at the throat of the Fatherland. I came to Switzerland and was glad to do what I was told, even going to Paris and to London twice, because I was able to pass myself as a French woman. But, oh, monsieur, it has all become so horrible in Switzerland, these past months—since strange orders have come—from where I must not tell you. And I want you to believe that I am so terribly sorry at what has happened to you."

"I appreciate your sympathy," said Farnham dryly, "but isn't it a trifle late? I'm assuming this is not some new ruse to win my confidence."

"Please, monsieur!" she pleaded. "But until now I did not know, I did not know my own feelings, not until I saw you standing there with your eyes upon your pistol. Then it came to me, the cruel treachery of it all, of the way you had been led into the snare against your will."

"Ah, then I was not a victim of your usual procedure in such matters?"

"Often have I helped lead others into this same trap, monsieur. Always it fills me with repugnance; but then, I reasoned, it was nothing so terrible since they stepped so eagerly into Señora Quarazza's embraces, or took the money greedily. A game of wits, in which we but turned the weaknesses of our enemies to our own needs. But with you, monsieur, it was different. I could see your disgust with that wanton, Carlotta, and the way they were forced to trick you into Abbas Hilmi's debt. Will you believe me when I tell you how sorry I am?"

"Again, mademoiselle," he said with dry politeness, "may I say that your sympathy is a trifle late. But if you are sincere, and it will console you, I forgive you freely for stripping me of my honor."

"I do not ask your forgiveness, monsieur," she cried. "I do not want it—until I have earned the right."

"I hardly believe I understand you, mademoiselle."

"If the evidence they hold against you, the check, your signature which they forced from you, if those were destroyed after you have gone from Switzerland, would you not be freed?"

He rowed in reflective silence for some time before he replied.

"Yes," he said. "If I could be sure that they were destroyed."

"They shall be!" Mademoiselle Le Rivet exclaimed. "Do not think, monsieur, that I shall not continue to serve my country faithfully. But I know that

the Fatherland does not want done such things as have been done to you and I shall not be happy a single moment until I have undone my part of the great wrong against you."

Farnham had turned the boat back toward the Quai at an indication from Mademoiselle Le Rivet. Of her sincerity he felt no doubt. What she had said to him, her revolt against the shameless intrigue, solved the riddle of her conduct at the château of Von Kulm, the enigma of her presence in the German secret service, her association with the brazen Señora Quarazza.

As they approached the shore, the color returned to mademoiselle's cheeks and there was a vitality again in her eyes. Farnham found himself wondering who she really was. He was on the point of asking, but held his tongue. The daughter of a colonel of hussars who was killed at Mons. That was clue enough to her identity.

"You are leaving at once for Paris, monsieur?" she inquired.

"At once," he responded.

"Then be most careful, monsieur," she warned him. "It is with the Baron Erich Wolf von Strindheim you will have to deal there, and there is no man of less conscience in all Europe!"

CHAPTER XIII

VON KULM

WHEN the very eventful and profitable sight seeing tour of Berne with the French military attaché ended at the Bellevue Palace, Captain Fox Elton went alone to his room and took a seat on the small iron balcony outside his windows. He sat there alone through the hours of the late afternoon, his eyes roving the distant peaks of the Bernese Alps. But while the wonder of the opalescent sunset glow above the towering Jungfrau and Silverhorn was not lost upon him, his conscious mind was busy with the things he had learned today, their possible effects upon his plans for pitting himself against the German spy entrenchment.

Although the French officer finally had talked freely on the subject of Von Kulm, what he had been able to tell Elton only added to the mystery of that elusive shadow. By the skilful use of money in business investments and public benefactions, the name Von Kulm was securely entrenched in Swiss confidence and affection. Any thought that his presence in Switzerland might have an ulterior purpose had been driven from the Swiss mind by Von Kulm's activities since his arrival nearly a year ago, in the third year of the war. The word had gone out, to be accepted by the Swiss, that the count was a man of very great sensitivity who was so affected by the war that he came to the purer atmosphere of a neutral country to make his home, and therefore he was no longer German.

The reputation he had built for himself was a tribute to the skill of German war propagandists, Lareaux had contended, since Von Kulm himself rarely appeared in public. Most of his time was spent, report had it, at his palatial château, set on a steep shore of Lake Geneva on the Swiss side shortly north of the veer of the lake at Prangins, where on clear days the shores of France lay shimmering in the distance.

Occasionally the count might be seen dining at Berne or Geneva, always with a small group of his immediate retainers, and invariably with some transient neutral notable. Such men as the ex-khedive of Egypt, the deposed Russian grand duke and other royal exiles had been guests at his château over long periods. But not even the alert French attachés, with their dire suspicions of the man, and their own hidden organization of secret service operatives, were able to chart his personal movements and habits.

He went about always, even in the grounds of his château, with retainers close at hand. Usually when he appeared in one of the cities, a man went ahead of him, others at each flank, while two brought up the rear, an adaptation of

a military formation used to protect a column of troops passing through enemy country. Ostensibly, these shadows were secretaries, or associates, and it had remained for the French to detect that they in reality formed a bodyguard.

Elton made his own estimate of the man with whom he must deal. An executive, a glorified spymaster directing the activities of a vast secret organization, his personality screened by adroit propaganda. Doubtless neither a soldier nor a secret service master, but a man of great affairs who had turned his abilities to the needs of war. There was already evidence enough of the man's remarkable intelligence; there was even evidence to support the French attaché's vivid claim that Von Kulm was an intellectual giant, turned monster by the war, become a master of intrigue whose dupes were statesmen, whose pawns were nations.

Deliberate assassination was a new word in Elton's code. He reflected grimly upon the French plan of dealing with Von Kulm. Perhaps, he thought, such an act would be justified by necessity. Had not the German war statesmen declared openly that Germany now knew no law but the law of necessity? Belgium had gone under the iron heels of such a code.

But Elton's mind recoiled at the thought of a shooting in cold blood. Often he had started dangerous miscreants on their way to the gallows, but his only part had been to bring them before the law to face the consequences of their misdeeds. Often, too, in the line of duty, he had been forced to shoot fast and straight. But always in self-defense.

As for getting contact with the German secret service, Elton had no uneasiness. That secret German cipher, in invisible ink on Farnham's intercepted letter to Paris, had pointed the way. Not by chance—for he had suspected the black and devious traps of Switzerland from the significant words "Black Book" in the cable from America. And he now felt no doubt but that sharp snares would beset his path the moment he set his feet down at Geneva as the replacement of Captain Farnham.

An overpowering weariness was clutching at his brain as he sat on into the evening. Not even the tang of the Alpine breeze revived him. Except for the few hours at Lausanne the night before, Elton had been without sleep for the better part of a week—a week of changing scenes and of wear and tear on his nerves. Until he returned to Geneva there was nothing tangible to be done, and it was impossible for him to return to Geneva until Farnham was out of the way.

But he put aside the clamor of his jaded body and sat idly on the balcony until the dinner hour was far advanced. He did this deliberately, in the knowledge that hidden eyes doubtless watched him closely. To be seen idly gazing into nothingness for several hours was an excellent antidote, he reasoned, against any German suspicion aroused by his afternoon ride with Lareaux. A minor detail; but to such minor touches it was always Elton's practise to attach the greatest importance. It was in the gathering of loose ends, the painstaking attention to minute details, that success or failure often lay, even in the most important cases, he had learned.

Having assumed a rôle, he must sustain that rôle with the utmost fidelity. Since his present rôle was that of an officer on a minor purchasing mission, he must keep up the semblance of leisure, of having little on his mind, of relative unimportance. Only when he was alone must he think and plan his real work. Otherwise he would be certain to betray himself to sharp eyes, eyes trained to read behind the shrewdest mask of pretense in the world of treachery and deceit about them.

Though he was prompted by a feeling of loneliness to go to dinner with one of the attachés of the American legation, Elton chose to dine alone. That would provide a further antidote against suspicion of his afternoon ride. Also it would add weight to a report that he was *persona non grata* at the American legation. Those con-

siderations, he concluded, were more valuable just now than any information he might be able to glean from one of the American military attachés.

When he entered the Red Room the head waiter met him with a slight lifting of the nose and escorted him gingerly to an obscure table in a far corner of the dining room. Elton, quickly sensing the reason for the flunky's disdain, proceeded to set himself right.

"The abominable war," he shrugged as he sat down. "It has delayed my baggage." He smiled condescendingly. "But you see I must insist on dining where the food is fit to eat, even if I am forced to appear without clothes."

"But yes, monsieur, I understand." The proud functionary thawed, uncomfortable at finding he had misjudged his guest. "This table, it is satisfactory, monsieur?"

"Under the circumstances," said Elton indifferently.

HE ORDERED a good dinner, although he was not hungry. The place was filled with men and women in evening clothes, many of them notables, Elton distinguished, and he wished to take his time in looking about, studying faces.

The American under-secretary who had given him so dubious a welcome to Switzerland sat at a table across the room with a rather flashy appearing woman whom Elton took to be French or Swiss. The official nodded coldly to him, and Elton had a moment's satisfaction at seeing him flush scarlet when the nod was not returned.

The diners were, for the most part, those who had been there at luncheon, except that all were in evening clothes, many of the attachés wearing high colored dress or full dress uniforms with decorations ranging from campaign medals to imperial orders. Since leaving Lareaux, Elton had made an effort to locate his inevitable shadow. He had caught no sign of him from the balcony, nor in the lounging room or corridor. He had no doubt but that in the room dined some one whose sole mission was to watch his every expression. But even with his skill in such matters, he found himself unable to single out the shadow. The reader of lips was not in the room. He concluded that no bungling operative dogged his trail tonight.

In his rounds of the faces of the Red Room, his eyes were arrested by three men who sat at a large table that, with a smaller table, was partially screened from the main dining room by potted palms. They were distinctive faces even where strong faces, in the varying molds of many nationalities, were the rule. The two who sat at the sides of the table were distinctly Prussian, of the military caste; cold level eyes, severe, close lipped mouths under bristling wisps of hair, closely cropped, square heads. Their age, the unrelenting severity of every line in their faces, suggested long service and probable high rank, though they wore neither uniform nor decorations.

The third man, seated between these two, was not so readily classified. He was distinctly German, Elton guessed, but evidently not a soldier. As the three exchanged words, Elton found himself wholly absorbed by the third man. A personality. His forehead was sloping but very broad and high, his eyes large, protuberant and as devoid of expression as the lenses of field glasses, which they seemed to suggest by their size and dull, unchanging luster. His mouth was irregular and loose, but set over a broad protruding chin, hinged by a masterful line to heavy, deepset jaws under small, deepset ears. The sloping, stooped shoulders and broad, deep paunch, confirmed Elton's first thought that the man was not of the German military caste.

"Monsieur? The food and service, it is satisfactory?"

The head waiter broke in upon Elton's observations. Having sensed, in Elton's *savoir faire*, a liberal tip, the waiter was smoothing over his initial mistake in seating him, now that dinner neared an end.

"Not bad," said Elton.

"Monsieur is a stranger in Berne?" the fellow persisted ingratiatingly.

"Just arrived."

"There are many interesting guests tonight, monsieur."

"Indeed?"

"Many of our most prominent ministers and gentlemen of large affairs." The waiter indicated some of the more interesting personages, and finally added with a quick glance through the maze of potted plants, "And the richest man of all. You are fortunate, monsieur, to have a seat here where you can see a remarkable gentleman."

Elton's eyes instinctively went to the broad table.

"But no, monsieur," the waiter corrected. "The man you see is Herr Sirwolten, his Excellency's secretary. At the table to the right, the gentleman who sits with his face to us, he is the Count Kulm."

Elton did not start at hearing the name. His nerves, even when frayed by fatigue, were proof against such poor discipline in public. But he felt the stir in his blood, the rising of his pulse, a tingling at the roots of his hair. His glance was momentary, as if the subject were of little interest to him.

"A statesman?" he asked casually.

"Our noblest philanthropist," said the waiter ardently. "One who has done more for Switzerland than all others, since he came to live among us."

Elton dismissed the subject and the waiter by ordering a small glass of cognac. Nor did he glance again through the palms. The waiter, he guessed, was innocent enough, and yet it might be a subtle ruse to test his interest in Von Kulm. There could be no end to prudence in this tainted atmosphere of intrigue.

Elton searched the picture his mind had seized in that instant his eyes were on the face of Von Kulm; an accurate picture which omitted no detail. The picture only deepened the enigma of the German spymaster. Von Kulm's long, thin face was angular, thick boned, severe, staring; the face of a Prussian military martinet. It had force, determination, cold intelligence. But it lacked imagination, or even craftiness, and bore no slight intimation of the facile brain that was credited to Count Kulm.

The distinguished party finished dinner and left the room. Many of the attachés leaped to their feet and stood at attention as Von Kulm passed through the dining room. Elton seized the opportunity to watch the man out with his associates. A small bristling fellow preceded, then came Von Kulm, with a tall, angular man at his left. Close behind was the secretary, Herr Sirwolten, hedged in by a retainer at right and left, while well behind them strode the seventh man, a broad, angular man, his hands thrust lightly in the pockets of his trousers.

A party of distinguished diners, straggling haphazard out of the Red Room, to all outward appearances. But Elton knew now, first hand, the studied precautions in which Count Kulm hedged himself against attack. Elton had no need to guess that the retainers were armed. His alert eyes caught the subtly concealed proof of that; and it was simple to measure the alert eyes and steel nerves of those who hedged in the party. He guessed that there were others in the room, shrewdly observant eyes in the lobbies, whose sole business it was to leap to any danger that might threaten the master. Not even a monarch could take greater pains to protect himself against conniving hands.

Elton reflected grimly. Though the French had found the spider's web, destroying the spider was not going to be so simple a matter.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MYSTERIOUS RUSSIAN

AT TEN o'clock the next morning, twenty minutes before the Lausanne express was due to leave Berne, Elton went to the public telephone in the Bellevue Palace and called up the

American legation. He got the petulant under-secretary on the wire after an uncomfortable wait.

"This is Captain Elton," he announced in a voice carefully gaged to reach the straining ears of a preoccupied young Swiss who had edged close by. "Any word for me, sir?"

"Hardly so soon," replied the official in a peppery voice. "We wired, in the matter of your return to France, only yesterday."

"I wasn't meaning that," said Elton. "I meant have you heard from Farnham down at Geneva?"

"Promptly, of course."

"He's on his way?"

"Exactly."

"Thanks, then I'll be moving on down there and report on the job."

"I'd rather suggest, dear fellow, that you do nothing of the sort, really."

"But my orders are to get busy on those purchases, and I should have gone down there last night, except that I rather hated meeting a chap when I'm taking his assignment away from him—and such a pleasant assignment."

"See here, Captain—that is—er—Mr. Elton?" the secretary announced testily, "I'd strongly advise that you wait until we release you!"

"And I'd strongly advise you, Mr. Secretary," Elton replied with a simulation of the other's temper, "that you attend to your own business. I was sent here to buy watches and compasses and lenses for the Army, and until those orders are changed, I'm going right ahead and obey them."

"But, I say," spluttered the secretary, "you are most damnably impertinent. I'll have you understand that—that—that—"

The secretary's impotent rage consumed him. He slammed up the receiver, while Elton stood smiling into the empty transmitter until he could compose his face, then stamped out, closed his account at the Bellevue Palace and took a taxicab to the railroad station where he boarded the Lausanne express.

Elton's nerves were tingling pleasantly as the train rushed ahead on the first leg of the trip to Geneva. Once, two months before, he had gone forward to the Front on a mission that was to take him over the top with the assault wave to trap a suspected German operative who had got command of a rifle company in a training camp back home. His sensations now were not unlike those of his approach to the battle area. Geneva, in his present mission, was the Front line. The enemy was entrenched there in force, and he was moving in to the attack.

Not even the roar of artillery, the plopping of shells from the German 77's, the high pulse of those tense minutes of waiting to leap out of the trench into the teeth of musketry, put the nerves to a stouter test. If there was a certain wild joy in such an adventure, it came to a man out of the realization that he was of the tempered steel that could stand up and take the gaff. A grim, unreasoning satisfaction of red blooded men, whose minds and bodies have been carefully nurtured for the test.

And though there was neither artillery nor musketry in the air of Switzerland, Elton knew that death lurked in unseen places, that the slightest misstep might be his last, once he cast his lot in the secret war that raged on Lake Geneva.

At Lausanne he caught a Geneva steamer early in the afternoon. He had passed Farnham, he estimated, a short distance out of Berne. An earlier train would have put him in Lausanne in time to meet Farnham at the boat landing of Ouchy. An interview with Farnham had proven a sore temptation. But Elton had clung tenaciously to his earlier decision, not to risk any such gamble. The Germans who had snared the first American, he reasoned, could be depended upon to bait their traps for the second purchasing agent. Therefore he could gain contact in any event. And he knew that the trap would be a death trap, one to spring without warning, if by some black mischance of circumstance or intuition the truth behind his simple masquerade had

been divined by the Imperial German secret service.

There was a moment's exhilaration in the feel of the No Man's Land of Geneva under his feet, as he stepped from the lake steamer late in the afternoon on to the narrow landing that juts far out into the water from the Quai du Mont Blanc. Sight of the imposing Beau Rivage stirred him with a sudden acute anxiety. It brought into his mind the one stupendous gamble he had been forced to take with his mission at leaving Paris. If that chance had gone against him, he knew that he was already beaten, his life already in jeopardy, his one place of safety an Allied camp beyond Annemasse.

But he forced this fear out of his mind and crossed blithely to the Beau Rivage, where he selected his room with a fastidious care, rejecting this room and that until he found one that suited his purpose. When his trunk and hand baggage were brought up, he motioned them indifferently into the large clothes closet that had been his one consideration in the choice of a room. The instant the porter was gone he was at his trunk in a fever of anxiety.

It had been opened, as he expected it would be, after reaching the hotel. The seal had been carefully removed and replaced, and Elton saw that the Germans had gone to great pains not to disturb the arrangement of his effects on the interior. With a hand that trembled slightly, he inspected two bottles of a rare old French brandy he had brought from Paris. The seals plainly had not been broken. With the aid of a magnifying glass he went over every inch of glass surface. When he found that the bottles had not been tapped, his face wreathed in a smile of relief. A small bottle of American shaving lotion likewise had escaped the prying eyes of the secret service. German thoroughness had overlooked an important bet.

Elton laid out his effects, made himself at home and dressed for an early dinner. He knew that from now on his plans must depend upon circumstances as they developed, emergencies as they arose. There were the French to be contacted at the Café du Nord. He estimated that Sergeant Walters might have reached Geneva by this time, something to be verified by a stroll past the entrance of the Kursaal at nine o'clock.

As for the German secret service, he must wait for the tentacles of Von Kulm's hidden octopus to reveal themselves. The Germans might show their hand immediately, or they might hold him under secret scrutiny for a week.

The shadows had been clinging to his coat tails all day, one relay following him to Lausanne, a second watching him into Geneva. There had been at least two operatives in each relay. One of them had attempted to engage him in conversation on the boat coming from Lausanne, but Elton had rejected the opportunity. He knew that the final estimate of him would not be formed by those shadows. They would merely dog his every move, report his every gesture. But their reports would find their way to a single acute spy executive for evaluation. It would be for that agent to interpret the American's actions, and Elton was shaping his movements accordingly.

The dining room of the Beau Rivage was a repetition of the gay scene at the Red Room. Ministers and attachés from Berne, consular agents of Geneva, wealthy war refugees from every clime, political agents, adventurers and spies of both sexes. Soon after he was seated, two women were placed at a nearby table, one of them, of a vivid Spanish type, flashing him a bold look which he spurned with a glassy stare that threw the woman into a crimson fluster. Possible German agents, he thought, but he was not rising to the bait too readily.

A MOMENT later the waiter leaned over him and Elton became conscious, without looking up, that the waiter had escorted some one to his table.

"Pardon, but you are the Monsieur Elton?" inquired the waiter timorously.

Upon receiving Elton's nod he added, "A gentleman to speak with Monsieur Elton."

A dapper little man presented himself glibly. Elton rose and fixed the visitor with a look of polite inquiry.

"Monsieur Elton?" inquired the little man.

"Yes," said Elton, without unbending.

"Pardon, monsieur, I am Monsieur Za who wishes to speak with monsieur on a matter of importance."

"Monsieur Za?" repeated Elton crisply. "I believe you have the advantage of me, monsieur. I do not place you."

"Monsieur Za of the House of Sigriswiller, monsieur."

"House of Sigriswiller? Again you have the advantage."

"The greatest manufacturers, monsieur, of instruments of precision. We have learned that monsieur is in Geneva to purchase—"

"You mean you have come to see me on a matter of business?" Elton asked sharply.

"But yes, monsieur. Pardon, but it was our first opportunity."

"You will excuse me, will you not, monsieur?" Elton bowed an icy dismissal. "I make it a practise not to mix business with my dinner, Monsieur Za!"

The little man turned livid under the affront. Elton caught the sinister glint that rose momentarily in Za's black eyes before he remembered himself and bowed a profound apology.

"You will pardon me, monsieur," he said humbly. "I came only because the House of Sigriswiller wishes to serve you, upon learning from our representative in Berne that you have arrive."

"Thank you," said Elton stiffly. "I'll be glad to discuss business with you at the proper time and place."

As Monsieur Za, denied a place at Elton's table, departed with the remnant of his dignity, Elton cast a quick look at the Spanish woman. She was watching the exit of Za with a staring perplexity. Elton settled back to his dinner, the minutest details of the scene passing in critical analysis before his eyes. If there had been any room for doubt, it had been effaced by that quick flash of passion in Monsieur Za's eyes. Not the normal reaction of a servile tradesman on the trail of a large business order. The Spanish woman's face had added a final touch of confirmation.

Elton bent low over his table, lest the satisfaction that filled him betray itself in his face. House of Sigriswiller. He repeated the name several times to himself. Monsieur Za had obligingly provided him with the point of contact with the German secret service. He was free now to bide his own time, reject all overtures until he was ready for the House of Sigriswiller. It would give him time for reconnoissance, to study the lay of the land and gain touch with his allies of the French secret service.

At eight o'clock he left the Beau Rivage, strolled down the quay, with its festoons of bright lights, to the bridge and crossed the Rhone to the Grand Quai where he found a table on the promenade outside the Café du Nord. The place was ablaze with lights, thronged with men and women of many nationalities who chatted and danced and drank. Here there was no slightest hint of the crimson maelstrom that raged a few hours by train to the north. An oasis in a war torn world, where gaiety and froth held sway. Pacifists, deserters, wantons, crooks, dizzy pleasure seekers; a splotch of vivid color, clinking glasses, lively music, the hum of lively chatter.

It startled Elton for a moment, the unreality of such abandoned gaiety in the somber world of war he had known these past fifteen months, a fitting rendezvous for foreign spies and adventurers, where they might sit for hours on the shore of the lake with heads together over their wine, without attracting attention.

Elton ordered French wine and sat with his left arm extended on the table so that he could see the dial of his watch. He had time, before the minute named by Lareaux, to verify his location in a

particular section of tables that would come under observation through the vital minute that would follow 8:22, French time. At the appointed time he gave the secret movement of his hand. Half a minute passed without results. He repeated the signal a second time, and continued it at brief intervals during the remainder of his minute.

There was no response. Fifteen minutes elapsed, in which his spirits dropped. He remembered the words of Lareaux. The French would see his signal and respond or not, as they saw fit. But he had counted firmly on a response. For another five minutes he waited, and then hurried across the quay to a taxicab. There was barely time to reach the Kursaal by nine o'clock, the prearranged hour for Walters to report his presence in Geneva.

He left the taxicab at the junction of the Rue Gevray with Philippe Plantamour and rounded the corner toward the entrance of the Kursaal exactly at nine o'clock. Elton's pulse leaped at sight of the figure approaching the Kursaal from the Quai du Mont Blanc. It was Walters, serene and unconcerned. The sergeant paused to light a cigar as he had been instructed. But Elton had no use for that lighted cigar tonight. He hurried to meet Walters ahead of the entrance. The sergeant marched past without the slightest flicker of recognition and turned into the Kursaal.

But not even the cheering sight of his trusted assistant shook off Elton's anxiety over the actions of the French at the Café du Nord. Did it mean that they had not seen him? Or that they distrusted him? Or that they meant to deal with Count Kulm in their own way? And now that Elton had revealed his own presence to the French, how far might he depend upon their prudence, how far might he have risked his own masquerade?

He hurried down the lake front, intent on crossing back over the Rhone to the Du Nord. There might be a chance yet. He was walking briskly when out of the motley clusters of vendors and boatmen a figure detached itself and walked beside him with extended arm.

"A motorboat, monsieur?" the fellow importuned. "An hour on the lake for the price of three francs!"

Elton, steeped in his own thoughts, did not look at the boatman.

"But, monsieur, I am the ver' best boatman on all Lac Leman," the fellow insisted, keeping pace with Elton as he spoke.

"I don't want a boat," replied Elton.

He cast an annoyed glance at the persistent boatman and as he did so was startled into an abrupt halt. The man's fingers flashed the French identification signal.

"Ah, yes, you are an expert boatman, eh?" Elton said softly. "After all I may benefit by a cooling ride on the lake, don't you think?"

"At the Du Nord we could not speak, monsieur," said the Frenchman in a mere whisper. "There was with us tonight a most important visitor. Monsieur is sent by D'Auteuil at Paris, or from Lareaux at Berne?"

"From both of them," said Elton. "Your boat is ready, monsieur?"

"But no," shrugged the Frenchman. He spoke rapidly, in a low voice. "Tonight it is impossible, monsieur. The Russian, Vladimir Lomonosoff, whom Lareaux sends to us, comes to join us even now from the Café du Nord. Again, on the sixth night from now, will my boat, the *Filisur*, be tied exactly here, and you must come promptly at the hour of ten."

A protest against this unexplained delay was on Elton's lips when the boatman turned abruptly away. He saw the fellow accost two men who had come abreast of them along the Quai. With a brief show of hesitation the two purchased boat tickets and followed the Frenchman to his launch.

Under the bright lights of the Quai du Mont Blanc, Elton caught their faces distinctly. One was Swiss or French, a young man, and distinctly a soldier in carriage and feature. The other was

plainly a Russian, a man with a long, egg shaped head, a long broad nose, sharp black eyes, deep set and very close together, and a thick, fishy mouth about which straggled a wispy Russian beard. The Russian, Vladimir Lomonosoff, whom the boatman had referred to, Elton guessed. But why, if the Russian had been sent by Lareaux, must they rush him away in such mystery and leave Elton to face six days of unexplained suspense and inaction?

CHAPTER XV

AN EMPTY ENVELOP

AT NINE o'clock the next morning, an hour after the opening of business in Geneva, Elton called the House of Sigriswiller by telephone. He gave decisive instructions to the secretary who answered the telephone in Sigriswiller's private office.

"This is Mr. Elton speaking," he announced. "Elton of an American firm here to investigate purchases on a very large scale. You will please advise Monsieur Sigriswiller—"

"But Monsieur Sigriswiller is just arrived and may speak for himself on such an important matter," interposed the clerk anxiously.

"Please say to him for me," replied Elton, "that I will call for a business conference at eleven o'clock. If that hour is not convenient for him, please have him designate some one to represent the firm. Good day."

The flustered clerk was still talking when Elton hung up, left the Beau Rivage and set out for a round of Geneva. Overnight he had made his decision. A wait of six days on some strange French whim was unthinkable. The French seemed to think the war need never end, he had often thought. Six days might mean nothing to them in their quest of Von Kulm's life, but he had no intention of wasting six precious days. He would make his contact with the German secret service immediately.

When he arrived at the house of Sigriswiller at eleven o'clock, Monsieur Za was waiting for him at the door, in hand rubbing eagerness. Za took him immediately to Monsieur Sigriswiller.

"My principal assistant," said the head of the firm, indicating Za. "In fact, he is almost a partner in the firm of Sigriswiller, and since he must handle many details, I will have him remain through our interview, if monsieur does not object."

"Certainly not," said Elton. "In fact I think it would be an advantage in the event we come to a business agreement."

Elton sketched in his wants tersely. He was authorized to arrange for the purchase of twenty thousand wrist watches, ten thousand compasses and a large number of field glasses—for the American trade.

"You see, monsieur," said Elton suavely, if not convincingly, "since the war, our stocks of these articles have all been bought up by our military forces and our civilian needs must be supplied abroad, chiefly in Switzerland."

"Yes, monsieur, I understand clearly," said Monsieur Sigriswiller, with the suggestion of a smile. "The quantities you wish are rather large, but at least we can supply the greater portion of your needs."

"And I thought," said Elton, "that if you were willing to serve as jobbers, you might deal with other Swiss manufacturers. It would enable you to make a small profit on that part of the transaction, and save me the difficult job of racing about over the whole map of Switzerland, a country with which I am unfamiliar. Besides, our legation at Berne is rather upset so that I—"

He cut off his sentence and glanced at the floor in the way of a man who has just remembered that he is talking too much.

"In any event," he covered, "I've figured it out that if I can make a satisfactory arrangement with you to supply the whole order, it will be good business, and I'm sure my Govern—that is, my

firm—will not object to a small jobbers' profit, say two to five per cent."

"I'll be very glad to oblige," said Sigriswiller. "With our knowledge of the industry, and our wide connections in eastern Switzerland, we should experience no difficulty."

They continued to discuss business details until they had reached a satisfactory understanding. The House of Sigriswiller was first to make a survey of Switzerland and then list the quantities of goods that could be delivered, time of delivery, price per unit. This was to be submitted to Elton within thirty days for approval in the name of his firm.

A clerk made an apologetic intrusion at the moment Elton was preparing to leave. Two very important customers were waiting to see Monsieur Sigriswiller personally, the clerk explained.

"Ah, the two wonderful ladies of great wealth who would have us make for them a clock of solid gold to place in their magic château," exclaimed Monsieur Za in sudden elation.

"Then do not let me detain you longer, Monsieur Sigriswiller," said Elton, rising to go. "After all, we have closed all the details of my business with you most satisfactorily."

As Sigriswiller escorted him out of the office and toward the door, Elton knew that his business here was far from an end. He had purposely made this engagement well in advance, so that the German secret service would have plenty of time in which to set the stage. Za's delighted reference to the two wonderful women told Elton that he was about to be baited with fancy German petticoats.

Sigriswiller conducted the introduction with fine skill; a casual meeting, an afterthought as he passed through the salesroom with Elton and came upon the two women. Elton met them with polite reserve, almost with indifference. Even if he had not suspected them of being tools of the German secret service, he would have classified Señora Quarazza immediately as an adventuress. Mademoiselle Le Rivet puzzled him only for a moment as to the rôle she played in the trap they were shaping for him. She was the brains of the duet, he decided, while the Spanish woman furnished the physical charm and coquetry.

He made the most of his opportunity to strengthen his masquerade by a strong show of reticence. It gave him a chance, moreover, to study these two agents with whom he knew he was destined to have important dealings within the next few days. Señora Quarazza set out promptly to overwhelm him with her charms. A dazzling physical type, who flirted skilfully, one whose ravishing beauty must have found its own way easily, Elton surmised, with impressionable elderly diplomats, or middle aged attachés who still dreamed of romance.

But it was Mademoiselle Le Rivet who aroused his interest, as she had attracted Farnham before him. Mademoiselle's remarkable beauty was enhanced by her poise, the intelligence of her face and voice, the unmistakable breeding and cultivated tastes in her bearing and dress. She insisted upon being merely politely civil, holding herself aloof while the Spanish woman made the advances. A Fraulein in the service of her country, Elton concluded; and with definite reservations at using the weapon of mere physical appeal. With this conclusion he turned back to the Spanish mercenary.

"Luck is all on my side today," he said engagingly, "else I might not have come here at this most delightful hour."

Señora Quarazza flashed a look of triumph to Mademoiselle Le Rivet.

"You are so ver' nice, and so much a stranger in Geneva," she responded in her most enticing way, "the automobile of Señora Quarazza it shall be at monsieur's disposal for a drive about the city, when you please."

"Thank you a thousand times, Señora Quarazza." Elton bowed. He had all but turned his back upon Mademoiselle Le Rivet. "But since my time is very much my own at present, and doubtless you are very much in need of your auto-

mobile, it shall be at your convenience rather than mine."

"This afternoon at two, monsieur," the Spanish woman rejoined quickly—a bit too quickly. "It shall call for you at the Beau Rivage."

"Am I presumptuous," ventured Elton, "if I dare to hope that I must not ride about your beautiful city alone, Señora Quarazza?"

"Monsieur must not think me so ver' cruel as to send him alone," she replied with a devastating smile. "Until two o'clock, monsieur—*au revoir.*"

THE AFTERNOON ride that followed confirmed Elton's belief that the German secret service was in a great hurry to spring its trap. Señora's flirtation developed into boldness, almost to the point of crudity. From time to time Mademoiselle Le Rivet was compelled to intervene a timely phrase, a covert reminder to the Spanish adventuress that she must not overplay her hand. But now that the way was open, Elton fell a ready victim. By the time they returned to the Beau Rivage he was completely subdued, an abject victim of the dazzling señora.

Thereafter he saw the net close swiftly and surely about him, as he stepped into the same pitfalls that had been laid for Farnham. The inevitable baccarat game was staged at an exotic resort on the lake, where Elton was allowed to win seven thousand Swiss francs. He permitted the señora to lure him into the poker game with the ex-khedive two evenings later at Von Kulm's château, an enterprise that left him in Abbas Hilmi's debt by forty thousand Swiss francs.

But when, on this evening, he found himself facing señora's outraged husband in a remote room of the château, Elton decided suddenly that he had followed the German schedule far enough in easy acceptance. He flung himself into a bold maneuver.

"Very good, señor," he snapped at the Spaniard, "if you are burning up for a duel, I'll accommodate you, any time, any place."

Señor Quarazza dropped down from his pose of outraged honor into a blinking bewilderment. Evidently it was a new experience to have one of señora's victims show fight when confronted by him. A man whose high position stood in jeopardy had small taste for a place in a triangular scandal, even though he had the physical courage to cross weapons with the Spaniard. Quarazza quickly recovered from his astonishment and renewed his bluff.

"With the sabers of the cavalry, monsieur," he shouted. "Monsieur shall answer to the mos' skilful swordsman of Spain for hees infamy!"

Elton's face registered sudden joy. Though he knew nothing of cold steel, he had mastered something of the art of cold bluff at the good American game of draw poker.

"Excellent, señor," he beamed. "You've named my favorite blade—and there may be a few things the best Spanish swordsman needs to learn about how to handle a saber in action. When do you wish your lesson, señor!"

The Spaniard's bold front was deflated again. Such a situation left him over his depth, just as Elton suspected. Quarazza remembered to muster his dignity and hand his card to Elton stiffly.

"My seconds, they shall call upon monsieur at hees hotel in the morning," he muttered, and strode solemnly out of the room.

Monsieur Za was on hand early the next morning at the Beau Rivage. The gloating insolence in which Za tied in the knots of the entanglement told Elton his own masquerade was safe. After he had accepted the Von Kulm check for forty thousand francs and cashed it at the bank of Geneva, as Farnham had been compelled to do, Elton renewed his bold front. Given time, he could repay the francs, he explained, and as for Señor Quarazza, he was ready to cross sabers immediately. But when Za sneered forth the charge that Elton was an American captain

incognito, in Switzerland to make military purchases, Elton sank back into staring impotence.

Step by step Za drove the sharp bargain, the bargain that had been forced upon Farnham. Slowly, taking care not to overplay his game, clinging tenaciously to the mental attitude of his unhappy rôle, Elton yielded. He would write the letters, but only provided he should be allowed to word them as he pleased. Also he must mail them personally at the American consulate at Geneva.

"Otherwise," Elton argued in the plaintive voice of a man who clings to the last shred of his virtue, "how am I to know that some secret message of some kind mightn't be written in after I had signed?"

Za shrugged indifference.

"As you please, monsieur," he replied. He added with a superior smile, "You see we have nothing to conceal. But please you will make haste now and write the first letter, which you will address to Captain Edouard Farnham at the American headquarters of Paris. It must be ready for the official mails which close in three hours."

When, two hours later, Za returned with a neatly typewritten copy of Elton's senseless note of greeting to Captain Farnham, Elton examined it with evident suspicion, but finally attached his signature, folded it in its envelop and arose to go to the consulate. There it must be censored and stamped, after which it would reach its destination with the swiftness and certainty of privileged official mail.

"Do not think our eyes will not observe you," cautioned Za, as they separated in the corridor outside Elton's room. "You will enter the consulate, post the letter and leave immediately." Za gave a malignant grimace. "And any failure on your part, monsieur—" he leered—"it will be most disagreeable for the Captain Elton of the Armée Americaine!"

"I have a habit of meeting my obligations, Monsieur Za," said Elton frigidly.

The haste in which they had forced him into their trap, their hurry over this first letter to Farnham, told Elton that in its invisible symbols there must lie a German secret communication of the first importance.

His mind worked rapidly on the walk to the consulate. An hour alone in his room at the Beau Rivage would reduce the German symbols in invisible ink to plain numerals. He knew that he was the only one who could break these symbols promptly to their English equivalents. But did he dare take the risk? The German secret service would check that first letter with relentless care. If he withdrew it, they would be certain to find it out.

He was entering the consulate, with only a few minutes left to decide, when a plan flashed into his mind. He accepted it immediately. As the consul was censoring the letter to Farnham, he scrawled a hurried note to the chief of staff at Paris:

> Dear Colonel: I should have some mail by now at the Crillon. So that it will not be delayed too long, will you please have some one forward it to me soon in care of the American consulate at Geneva? Very respt. —FOX ELTON

While the consul censored this second letter, Elton addressed its envelop. The consul affixed the official stamp to both envelops without question a moment later and returned them.

"One might suspect all us Americans were under suspicion." Elton smiled as he folded the letters for their envelops.

"A nuisance, indeed," agreed the consular agent. "But I suppose the Government can't be too careful in these days of German spies."

"I suppose not," said Elton casually.

He handed the two envelops to the consul and saw them dropped into the mail. The letter he had scrawled to the chief of staff at Paris was in Farnham's envelop. A stupid mistake. The German letter had found a hiding place in the folds of Elton's shirt.

CHAPTER XVI

THE SWISS NAVY

ON LEAVING the consulate Elton wandered rather aimlessly about the streets of Geneva until the dinner hour. His gait was ambling, his eyes on the pavement barely ahead of his feet, to all appearances a man steeped in bitter despair.

Such a pose was doubly valuable just now. It gave him an opportunity to think the while it fed the assurance of his German shadows. A broken, dispirited man was precisely what they would expect to see after the day's events.

Urgent as was that German letter to Farnham at Paris, it must wait until late at night. Tonight at ten was the time of his rendezvous with the mysterious French boatman on the Quai du Mont Blanc. While it might appear simple and safe enough to go from the Beau Rivage to that meeting a few minutes before ten, Elton chose to lay a careful foundation for the delicate encounter. After walking about until dusk, he had his dinner at the Au Coq-d'Or on the Rue Pierre Fatio; a glum, moping dinner, after which he went to the Casino, sat through an act of "The Barber of Seville", and left to stroll the lake promenades.

Ten o'clock found him at the appointed landing place of the *Filisur*. The French boatman was soliciting the passing throng, and reached Elton with no show of recognition.

"A boat, monsieur?" he importuned. "A ride of many miles on the beautiful Lac Leman for the three francs."

Elton slowed down while the Frenchman urged the superiority of his craft. Then, with a longing look out over the lake, he purchased the proffered ticket and boarded the *Filisur*. The contact was perfect, he felicitated himself.

The *Filisur* was shabby for want of paint, but was a long, lean craft, equipped for high speed and with a single small passenger cabin. In the open cabin sat a lone passenger who regarded the American curiously without greeting. But as soon as the *Filisur* was purring out into the lake the man became readily communicative.

"You are from Berne, monsieur?" he inquired placidly.

"From Lareaux," said Elton, identifying himself once more with the movements D'Auteuil had given him.

The other responded to the identification and introduced himself.

"I am Captain Rougemont, French Second Section," he said simply.

"Elton of the American Service," replied Elton.

"On the lake we are free to speak our minds," said Rougemont, noting Elton's reservation in witholding his rank and assignment. He added with a laugh, "There are no German ears on the water —and the worse that can happen here is that we be interviewed by the abominable Swiss navy, in which event we can remain very discreet."

Rougemont was a man of perhaps thirty, of medium size, trim and wiry. His face was aquiline, but frank and open, and as clear cut and immobile as a cameo; his thoughts, feelings and actions masked in the cold, cultivated *savoir faire* of the French secret service.

"A thousand pardons, monsieur, that you have been compelled to wait six days for us," said Rougemont, "but you presented yourself at a most critical moment, if we are to deal promptly with the Count von Kulm."

"The delay was a disappointment, of course," said Elton, "but I have been able to make some use of my time."

"Within the week I am pleased to report," said the Frenchman bluntly, "Von Kulm will be no more. All—it is arranged, monsieur."

"The count is to be assassinated?"

Rougemont's shoulders lifted slightly.

"The execution, monsieur, it is the more proper word," he corrected. "Von Kulm shall pay to the French service the price of his monstrosities."

Elton reflected briefly upon this claim, the picture in his mind of that show of the spy master's entrenchment as he left

the Red Room of the Bellevue Palace at Berne.

"You have found a way to break through Von Kulm's defense?" he inquired. "In the short time I have been here, Captain Rougemont, I've learned something of how deeply the German entrenches himself, and he goes about always with a strong bodyguard."

"Not even a general in his deep dugout takes greater precautions, monsieur." Rougemont smiled enigmatically as he added, "But need one break through a barrier once he is over the wall?"

"You mean you have gotten inside? The spy double, eh?"

"But yes, monsieur, the spy double."

"One upon whom you are certain you can depend?"

Rougemont leaned forward and spoke in a low voice despite their security far out on the lake.

"But yes, monsieur, one who will not fail us; the Russian, Vladimir Lomonosoff, who has come to us from the Imperial Russian secret service."

The long, sinister face of the Russian whom he had seen entering the launch six days before flashed before Elton's mind. A conniving wretch, coldly cruel and without scruple. If he was of the old Czarist secret police he was trained in intrigue, ruthless assassination for the reward of royal rubles. But with Russia on the rocks, the old Imperial régime in ruins, was not Lomonosoff left a mercenary adventurer, for sale to the highest bidder? Elton voiced his thoughts frankly.

"Of those things we have thought, monsieur," said Rougemont, with hesitation. "But Vladimir has his own good reason for what he will do, a burning for revenge which not even Von Kulm's lavish francs may cool."

"A conniving rascal sometimes can let revenge wait upon fortune," Elton persisted. "Spy doubles are safe only when they are of our own nationality and service."

"But have no fear of Lomonosoff, monsieur." Rougemont held his ground. "There is no precaution we have not taken. The Russian he have no need for the Von Kulm's francs. From the wreck of Russia he brought away a great fortune. But the revenge, it is the thing for which he live. It is for the revenge that he pretend to enter the German secret service; and when he is ready, he comes to us. For weeks we wait, monsieur, until his story we verify, then the French oath we give him, and the French pistol with which he is to kill Von Kulm!"

"A hatred of the Germans born of the war, of the German intrigue with the Bolsheviks who are reported to have murdered the Czar?" Elton queried.

The Frenchman shook his head vigorously and gave a scornful laugh.

"Of such a passion, monsieur, any Russian might easily recover. But I will tell you and you may judge for yourself. Lomonosoff's beautiful wife, also, was of the Imperial Russian secret service. She was dispatched to Switzerland to trail the sly Lenine who was said to be plotting with the Germans at Berne under the name of Ilyitch Ulinoff for the revolution that was to overthrow Russia. German marks were needed, and German brains and a refuge for the Russian conspirators until they were ready for their great coup. It was—"

Rougemont broke off sharply, reached under his seat for a pair of binoculars and leveled them upon a splotch of light that was moving across their starboard bow.

"The Swiss navy, perhaps, Jacques?" he called out to the boatman. "You will keep them in sight."

He surrendered the glasses to the one-man crew of the *Filisur* and centered his attention back upon Elton.

"But Lenine, he is the sly wolf, much too sly for the Imperial Russian secret agents. He manufacture his revolution and when it is ready, he go to Russia, and Russia goes up—*poof!* For the month Madame Lomonosoff is without news, then comes the word that the Russian secret service it is gone and Vladimir he is dead defending his Czar.

"A beautiful lady of the secret service, monsieur," Rougemont continued, "who

no longer has a country, or a husband, she shall not be left idle when there is the conniving Von Kulm to deal with. His agents prey upon madame and soon she is in their service. Then comes Lomonosoff out of Russia, a shadow who slinks under cover, until he learns what he may suspect. When he knows the worst, he takes the Prussian oath, monsieur—the dip of the German ball pen in his open veins—but not in the name of Lomonosoff; and to this day the Madame Lomonosoff does not know that he has come alive out of Russia, nor does Von Kulm suspect the adder that he holds close to his breast."

Elton's brows knit as Rougemont stopped speaking to light his pipe with a look of triumph.

"But I don't quite understand," said Elton, "why the Russian should hide himself from his wife, or why you conclude on that account that he is hunting revenge."

"Is it not that I have made myself clear, monsieur?" said the Frenchman with surprise. "Ah, perhaps I should speak more plain. Madame Lomonosoff is very young, very beautiful, and the Boche he make of her the spy, yes. But also, monsieur, the mistress."

"Of Von Kulm!"

"But no! Von Kulm, he is the man of superb intelligence, monsieur, the monster without heart or bowels. Too shrewd a man, much too cunning is Von Kulm, to knot his feet in petticoats. It was one of his younger satellites, one whom to Lomonosoff remains a shadow, an operative who has since gone to Belgium, and is not returned."

"Then why," puzzled Elton, "the blood grudge against Von Kulm, instead of the count's guilty henchman?"

"Monsieur, I perceive, you do not understand the Russian mind. To Lomonosoff it is the greater revenge that grow in his mind. After all, since he do not find the guilty puppet, then what a death blow he can deliver to the German secret service—by taking the life of Von Kulm! That, monsieur, is a Russian revenge—and Vladimir Lomonosoff is Russian!"

FOR SOME moments Elton searched the logic of Rougemont's words in reflective silence. The motive of revenge was sound enough, he concluded, and Lomonosoff the man to wreak such vengeance upon the betrayers of his wife. Little as he liked the idea of assassination, even as a wartime extremity, after all it was not his affair. And Elton held no doubt that the destruction of the German spy master of Switzerland meant the prompt destruction of the German spy concentration in Switzerland. He had known even great corporations of peace time to crumble and fall at the death of a master, because there was no one to fill the shoes of genius.

"And monsieur's plans?" the Frenchman queried.

"At the present moment, my Captain," said Elton, "I have no other plans than to complete what we might call my detailed reconnoissance of the German secret service in Switzerland. Of course, I want to do everything I can."

"Ah, but with the death of Von Kulm," rejoined Rougemont, "there will be much to do. Like rats will we trap these witless henchmen when their master is out of the way. We will clear the lake of their boats, the frontier of their runners, the legations of their sharp ears—and in France we will fall upon their outposts, at Paris, at Le Havre, at Bordeaux; at San Sebastian and Madrid, and perhaps in London and every capital of the world."

The Frenchman's gray eyes were aflame as he rose to the picture of their victory. His cool reserve gave place to a burning enthusiasm.

"The Imperial secret service was a jest, monsieur," he exclaimed, "a jest until Von Kulm came, a man who must have sprung from civil life since his name is not known to the secret records of France, nor England or Russia. They were no match for the French, or even for the English. It was as simple as trapping dumb sheep. And when the mind of Von Kulm is put to sleep, we shall laugh at them again."

The shrill notes of a siren came over the water. Rougemont looked up quickly and fixed his eyes briefly upon a long, lean finger of light that cut the darkness of the lake aft the launch.

"The Swiss navy, it is most curious tonight," he said calmly. "It is perhaps that we shall have the visitors aboard the *Filisur*."

"A Swiss lake patrol?" Elton queried.

Rougemont laughed ironically.

"More likely the audacious Boche," he replied. "To their effrontery, monsieur, there is no limit; not even do they hesitate to prowl the lake as Swiss when they wish to pry." He crossed his legs and filled his pipe complacently. "But please to have no uneasiness, monsieur. They will come aboard, only to find two innocent passengers who have nothing to say."

Elton half rose. He suppressed an involuntary jerk of his hand to the hiding place of the letter to Farnham. The *Filisur* was cutting the water at high speed toward the lights of Geneva. Behind, the patrol was gaining measurably.

"There is the danger that they might search us?" Elton asked with unconcealed anxiety.

"It is possible, monsieur," said Rougemont. He sobered as he sensed Elton's dilemma. "If it is that you have papers of identification, monsieur," he prompted, "it is discreet that you leave their ashes in the lake at once."

"But that is impossible," cried Elton. He surveyed the situation swiftly. The light of the Jetée des Eaux Vives was straight ahead, the right bank of the lake two hundred meters to his left. Elton got to his feet.

"A sharp turn of the boat to your right!" he shouted at the boatman.

"But monsieur—"

He heard Rougemont's cry of remonstrance as the boat heeled sharply in a band of white spray while he stood balanced at the gunwale. The next instant Elton plunged into the lake, fully dressed, his cap tucked in the pocket of his trousers. The momentum sent him spinning drunkenly under the churning surface of the icy water. When he finally got himself under control, he rose to the surface guardedly, gulped air into his lungs and dived. Swimming mostly under the surface of the lake, he made his way to the shore.

As his hand came upon the rocky shore, he looked back across the lake. The pursuit boat had come up with the *Filisur*, which had shut down her engines and was standing by obligingly. Elton drew himself on to the shore and set out toward the nearby lights of the northern environs of Geneva.

The vital letter reposed safely where he had concealed it in his shirt. As for the dive in the lake, he knew the water would not destroy the invisible ink of the German symbols. But he knew that he dared not return to the Beau Rivage drenching wet. There would be strain enough on German credence when he explained later that the Farnham letter got into the wrong envelope by mistake at the legation. The letter Farnham would receive offered verification of such a claim. But a leap into the lake late at night was a circumstance that might turn the balance against him.

In an obscure little street of small residences, leading into the Avenue Favre, he selected a house in which the lights still burned and presented himself at the door. A small accident to his rowboat, he explained; a hundred francs for the privilege of a fire at which to dry himself.

The hundred francs were spurned. Swiss hospitality was not for sale. But the house was his, and the offices of monsieur and madame. He dried his clothes, pressed them, even starched and ironed his collar and shirt, and pressed his tie. At midnight he left the place, dry, and at one o'clock a taxicab delivered him at the Beau Rivage, immaculate in the clothes which he had worn at leaving, ready for the minutest inspection by the sharp eyes that he knew observed his return.

He went to his room, read the Geneva newspaper published in French, undressed

and went to bed. For an hour he lay without moving. Then he rose noiselessly, stole through the dark room into his clothes closet and closed and locked the door.

CHAPTER XVII

ELTON BORROWS A LIGHT

THE STUFFY black hole underwent a swift transformation as Elton opened his trunk, brought forth a large flashlight, a pad of scratch paper, the two bottles of ancient cognac and drew a suitcase in front of the trunk to serve as a seat. A workable office, and one that would escape the vigilant eyes of the German secret service. The only place in Switzerland where he might work in security, since he had no doubt that even a flashlight in his sleeping room would draw prompt attention from the shadows.

The letter to Farnham had met with small damage by its immersion in Lake Geneva. He examined it critically. The typewritten message was only slightly blurred, a fact of no consequence. But the blank spaces were unsoiled, the water having had no effect upon the suspected invisible inks of the Germans.

He opened the two cognac bottles and, using a rubber bathing cap as a container, mixed the developing chemicals, into which he dipped the German letter. Two minutes of the immersion slipped by, and on the white surfaces of the paper grew a yellowing rash. Another two minutes and the rash took form, became numerals. He watched the development under a strong glass until the figures were clear enough for copying, then corked the cognac bottles, returned them to his trunk, extinguished the flashlight and stole back into his bedroom to empty the bathing cap and fill his lungs with fresh air.

Upon returning in a few minutes to his improvised office, Elton set feverishly at work upon the symbols. A brief message, he estimated from the number of figures, perhaps not more than thirty words. He took the first group and laid them out for testing, dividing them into twos on the theory that they followed one of the ciphers he had previously broken, two numerals representing each letter of each word. On a separate sheet of paper he wrote down from memory the several secret keys that back in France had cost him long sleepless days and nights of incessant labor. This one finally clicked:

	9	8	7	6	5, 4, 3	2	1
1 2 3	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
4 5 6	H	I	J	K	L	M	N
7 8 9	O	P	Q	R	S	T	U
0 & ?	V	W	X	Y	Z	,	.

In this key each two figures of the cipher message identified immediately to those holding the key, a letter of the English alphabet, the first of each two numbers fixing the column, from top to bottom, in which the letter was located. The second figure indicated the row, from left to right. Hence, given the figure 91, the German agents throughout the world who carried the key in their minds, need only seek out the 9 column in the key and move downward with pencil or finger until they encountered the row at the left of which stood the figure 1. Therefore 91 deciphered into A.

Von Kulm had complicated his cipher further, however, as Elton had good reason to know from his wracking struggle to break the cipher in the first place. It was a cipher to defy the high frequency tables of the Allied cipher experts. Use of the English alphabet confounded the best French experts at the outset. Use of a variety of symbols for letters used most frequently in the making up of words deepened the puzzle even for the best English experts. For while 91 represented the letter A, so did 92 and 93; and each letter of the alphabet likewise had three symbols in the key, while the letter E, the highest frequency letter in English, bore nine different symbols in the key—51, 52, 53; 41, 42, 43, and 31, 32, 33.

Elton wrote down the first line of

German numbers, divided into twos, and applied the key. They broke promptly into a startling message:

47 33 16 62 91 24 10 11 1? 79 10 14 99 1?
S E N D A M . G . O . N O .

15 84 15 52
N I N E

One by one he wrote down the letters of the entire German message. When the "blank" spaces of the innocent letter to Captain Farnham had yielded its secret missive to Von Strindheim's rendezvous under Paris, Elton extended the abbreviations, and sat back to read it in its entirety:

> Send American General Orders No. 9 instantly by courier. Berlin commends your outline but commands entire order as pieced together from the Americans be furnished. Learn date of attack promptly to facilitate our counter actions. His Excellency's Paris inspection delayed for time being. (Signed) No. 1.

Elton, with infinite care, memorized the message, reduced his worksheet and Farnham's letter to powdered ashes, disarranged his office and returned silently to bed. But he had no thought of sleep. The fatigue that had gripped him earlier in the night, after his day's adventures, was gone entirely. Though the meaning of that letter had flashed upon him with the first deciphered line of the German message, he studied it out now, weighing the words.

General Orders No. 9. The words set his pulse pounding. There was no escape from its meaning in that message. He knew, before he left headquarters, that the first great American attack to be staged in France by the American Army was reduced to a carefully guarded sheaf of mimeographed paper, under the title "General Orders No. 9"—the pending attack of the First Army to reduce the German salient at St. Mihiel. And he knew now that these orders were in the hands of Von Strindheim at Paris, that Von Kulm commanded his spymaster of the French nest to send these orders forward instantly by courier.

It was with an effort that he contained himself against the urge for action, an impulse to get this critical information to Colonel Rand. There was no reckoning the consequences of a betrayed battle order. The Americans would be robbed of the whole weapon of surprise. Terrific counter artillery could be prepared against the American artillery preparation fire. German concentrations could be centered to crumple the main effort of the American infantry. Such a betrayal might cost ten thousand lives, or fifty thousand, and cast disaster upon Allied morale.

The day and hour of attack alone had escaped the German intrigue. Probably because it had not been fixed, Elton guessed. But the hour would be set, would be sent out to corps, to divisions, to brigades, even to regiments, well in advance of the H hour of M day. It was Von Strindheim's orders to learn that secret, report it to the German high command. Whether through lack of proper American precautions or because of the skill of Von Strindheim's secret agents in France, Elton reasoned that the leak which had given to the Germans the battle plans for St. Mihiel might also give them the hour of attack.

Daylight was in at the windows before Elton had decided upon his course of action. He slipped back into his sanctuary, got from his trunk the bottle of shaving lotion, stripped the wrapping from an American cigaret, and with many references to the little Service Bible he had brought from France, filled the cigaret paper with minute figures in invisible ink. His figures were not cipher, but an inscrutable code he had memorized for his own use and given the original key to Colonel Rand. The figures he jotted down indicated pages, paragraphs and word sequences of passages in the tiny testament. Rand alone would be able to read what he had written. When he had checked his message, he encased it in black sticking plaster and embedded it in the butt of a long black cigar. This done, he went back to bed and turned his mind to sleep, in the knowledge that he was

helpless to make a further move until night came again.

MONSIEUR ZA broke upon his slumber shortly after nine o'clock. Immediately after he had admitted the sleek little German agent, Elton was aware of a restraint in the fellow's manner. Za had all of his cold assurance about him, but there was an unfathomable, sinister light in his blue eyes, the hint of an unspoken taunt in his manner, a suggestion of deviltry which he was keeping strictly to himself.

"There are many letters today, monsieur," said Za. "You will please to dress as quickly as possible."

"A devil of a night I've had of it," Elton complained. "Not until daybreak was I able to sleep, and I'm not going to do anything without having my breakfast."

"An easy conscience, monsieur," smirked Za. "It is the best remedy, the saying goes, for one who does not sleep."

"My conscience would not trouble me," Elton joined warmly, "if you would stay away from here with your damnable letters. They may read harmless enough —in fact they seem silly and absurd— but just the same I'm admitting that the whole affair is upsetting my nerves."

"You may write while you eat, but the letters they must be prepared at once," Za ordered, ignoring Elton's plaint.

While he waited for his breakfast, and for the better part of an hour following breakfast, Elton penciled one brief letter after another, twenty of them in all, one to each address furnished him by Za. They went to addresses ranging from London to Madrid, New York, Mexico City, Manila, Bombay, Hongkong, Tokyo, but with the majority of them for destinations in France.

"Monsieur is to have the great honor," said Za, rather casually, as he gathered up the letters and prepared to leave. "Please that you make no engagement for the night of tomorrow. At the château of his Excellency there is to be a great reception in honor of the grand duke who soon returns to Russia."

"I rather surmised," said Elton coolly, "that I would hardly be welcome again at Count Kulm's château."

Za gave a deprecatory shrug.

"One might so think, monsieur," he agreed, with a slight lifting of his nose. "But his Excellency is a very unusual man, and forgive many things."

"That is very generous," Elton replied in kind, "but I am not at all certain I should care to accept any further favors from the count until I have refunded the amount I appear to owe because of Abbas Hilmi's trick poker bet."

"As you please," said Za dryly. "But at four of this afternoon I shall return with the letters prepared for monsieur's signature. Please that you be prompt."

When he had made certain that Za was out of the hotel, Elton entered his clothes closet where from memory he wrote down, over and over again, the names and addresses he had gleaned from Za. He associated each name and address with some familiar thought or object, the better to fortify his memory against the day when he would have urgent need for those addresses. Having done this, he burned his notes and was preparing to leave the hotel when summoned by the telephone in his room.

It was Mademoiselle Le Rivet.

"A most charming visitor to Geneva is my guest," said mademoiselle. "Will you not join us at luncheon on the terrace of the Beau Rivage at one o'clock? I wish to present you to the Comtesse de Coudrée."

"Thank you, mademoiselle," replied Elton bruskly, "but I am hardly in a humor to meet even the most charming of women. You will excuse me?"

There was a moment's silence. Elton fancied he could see Mademoiselle Le Rivet swallowing her pride.

"But, monsieur," she pleaded, "there is no reason that you should be so disagreeable. The countess is even more charming than Carlotta."

"Hang Carlotta!" said Elton.

"I suspected the señora would get dreadfully upon your nerves." She laughed. "Carlotta usually does—with gentlemen. But the countess must have an escort for tomorrow to the château of Count Kulm—"

"Since you insist, mademoiselle," Elton responded more agreeably, "I am helpless to deny you anything. I will join you at luncheon—though I am not at all sure I will be in any mood for the reception at the château."

Za's informal invitation to another affair at Von Kulm's, Mademoiselle Le Rivet's insistence that he meet and escort the Comtesse de Coudrée, of whom Elton had never heard, first quickened him with curiosity, then stirred him with a mild uneasiness. Such a maneuver followed no logical sequences, so far as he was able to discern.

He went promptly to the terrace. Mademoiselle Le Rivet met him with her usual reserved cordiality. Outwardly she gave no indication of knowing his sorry predicament; rather a reassuring fact, Elton thought, since it must mean she was not suspicious that he had seen through her masquerade. The Comtesse de Coudrée was a woman of the most striking beauty, with nothing of the boldness of Señora Quarazza. In her large, limpid brown eyes, eyes that were set far apart under finely arched brows, he caught a touch of boldness, the veriest hint of the adventuress. But this was offset by the repose of her fine features, the seriousness of her mouth and the poise of her bearing.

The name Comtesse de Coudrée was French, and the woman was something of the French type of the high Pyrenees, although Elton thought she might be Rumanian or Greek. There was no knowing what nationalities served the German secret service in Geneva, though logically they took French names in an environment where custom, language, populace and sympathy was mostly French, as it was in the country around Geneva.

"The countess is my guest," Mademoiselle Le Rivet repeated as Elton seated himself with the two women on the luncheon terrace. "From Constantinople and Athens—and since you are the only unattached gentleman who has been honored by the Count Kulm—"

"Deeply as I appreciate the honor, mademoiselle," Elton parried, "I had decided not to go to the reception tomorrow night."

"Then I shall change your mind, monsieur," Mademoiselle Le Rivet said imperiously, following her words with an engaging smile. "And now that is settled, our boat will pick you up sharp at nine at the Quai du Mont Blanc."

"Orders are orders, mademoiselle." Elton smiled. "It is a pleasure to obey your commands."

The conversation was shifted immediately by mademoiselle to small chatter. At two o'clock the women left for a drive, Elton returning to his room where he lay until four puzzling upon the possible meaning of the day's developments. What new maneuver were the Germans up to? Why the interest of Mademoiselle Le Rivet and her olive skinned guest? Why the invitation to a Von Kulm reception? Did they not already have him securely trapped, a victim who must sign their letters, which Elton knew was the greatest possible service that any one could give—the protection of the official courier mails.

Za came promptly at four with the letters typewritten and addressed for signature and mailing. As he signed them, Elton tested his memory of names and addresses. Not once did he fail. The German agent remained only until the letters were signed, saying very little, and following close behind when Elton left for the consulate. At the consulate the letters were passed without reading. Elton sealed them in their proper envelops and dropped them into the official mail. Then he set out as he had done the day before, for a round of Geneva, ending his jaunt at dinner time at the Kursaal.

Until a few minutes before nine o'clock he sat in the Kursaal, dining, listening to the music, watching the gay dinner

dancers. Half a minute before nine he was on his way to the door. It was a few seconds short of nine when he passed into the open air. Twenty feet away, as dependable as a clock, was Sergeant Walters. Elton fumbled in his pockets for a match with which to light the cigar in his mouth.

"Pardon, monsieur," he interrupted Walters as the veteran non-com, incognito in rather lurid civilian clothes, turned to enter the Kursaal, "but may I trouble you for a light?"

Walters, puffing silently at a long black cigar which he had just lighted, fumbled in his vest pocket.

"A light from your cigar will do well enough, monsieur," prompted Elton.

"Sure enough," said Walters.

"We must speak quickly," said Elton, in a low aside. "Can you make it into Thonon tonight?"

"Sure, sir, I'll make it if I have to swim."

Elton returned the cigar, deftly substituting his own weed and retaining the one Walters had lent him.

"In the butt of this cigar is a message. Get it back to Sands and have him ride like the wind with it to headquarters."

"Yes, sir."

"When you return, a table at the Café du Nord at eight hereafter."

"Yes, sir."

Elton strolled on down to the Quai du Mont Blanc and turned toward the Beau Rivage. He puffed contentedly at Walters' cigar, a contentment that drew no substance from the sergeant's pungent and unusually vile Swiss cigar. He knew that the warning of St. Mihiel was on its way at last to headquarters. Walters would put it across the frontier if he had to shoot his way through.

CHAPTER XVIII

VLADIMIR LOMONOSOFF

THERE was something both amusing and perplexing to Elton in the crude technique of the German shadow who had been trailing him since he left the legation. An amateur private detective could not have been more easily picked up as he followed at fifty paces, dodging occasionally in and out of doorways. It was distinctly a discordant note in the German secret service finesse in Switzerland.

On reaching the Beau Rivage, Elton turned in, took an elevator to the second floor, hurried to a rear entrance and left through a rear door. The maneuver succeeded. But as he passed over the Rhone, he saw that he was trailed by a second shadow, one no more deft than the one he had so readily eluded. He found a table at the Café du Nord and spent the evening watching the night gaiety, listening to the music, with no wish to contact with the French. Aside from his need of relaxation, he felt that there was profit in doing nothing for one evening. It would look well on the report of his movements.

As for the letters he had signed, he had mailed them without reservation. His message to Rand would be at headquarters well ahead of the Paris express. Rand could arrange to have these letters tapped, the ones to distant capitals withdrawn and developed, and their invisible cipher content relayed by mail to Elton. As for receiving mail at Geneva from his superiors, there were no insuperable dangers. He had arranged with Rand that such letters as were absolutely necessary be sent in two envelops, the outer envelop to carry the real message, the inner one some harmless comment. Thus, if the Germans had a clerk installed at the consulate at Geneva and the legation at Berne, there would be no discrepancy in the report of letters received and those which he intended to leave about at the Beau Rivage for inspection.

Hence outgoing letters were the one great difficulty, especially if he should be held under close leash by a German secret service thoroughness that would insist upon knowing his every movement and action.

Late at night Elton returned to the Beau Rivage, wrote half a dozen letters to friends in France, carefully selecting his words for their effect upon the German

secret service, and turned in for a good night's sleep. In the morning Za called late, long after Elton had finished breakfast, bringing a single letter, addressed to a man of English name at Cairo, Egypt. The usually loquacious Za was even more reticent than on his previous visit. He made no reference to the pending reception at Von Kulm's château, nor was he any more communicative when he called in the afternoon with the typewritten copy of the Cairo letter for Elton's signature.

The approach of night found Elton's nerves on edge, in spite of his best efforts to disregard his uneasiness. On rare occasions, when the demands of duty required it, Elton resorted to a mild sedative. Before leaving the hotel for the launch, shortly before nine, he fell back upon a bromide tablet. There was something unseating in the inscrutable mystery, the intangible tension about him, as he faced the night's adventure. It might be nothing more than a German secret service party, a night's relaxation in which Elton was to be paraded before other German operatives for their inspection. But Mademoiselle Le Rivet's insistence, the injection of the Comtesse de Coudrée into the situation, Za's conduct yesterday and today, were disquieting omens which Elton could not reconcile with any logical explanation of the event.

He was very much at ease when he boarded the boat at the quay. It was the same high powered, richly appointed craft that had taken him to the château before —the launch of Señora Quarazza, they had told him then. But the Spanish woman was not aboard tonight. Za, in civilian evening clothes, bowed him into the cabin where he found Mademoiselle Le Rivet and her mysterious guest from Constantinople.

The three were in high spirits as Elton joined them and the boat shot out into the lake, their faces flushed, their tongues loosened in the vivacity of having dined exceedingly well. The Comtesse de Coudrée took immediate possession of Elton, although with nothing of Señora Quarazza's brazen coquetry. The countess was resplendent in a gown of fine black lace; her great black eyes sparkled their animation, and as she centered her interest on Elton he thought that, except for the certain slight overboldness of her eyes he had never seen a more dazzling type of beauty, nor one who held less restraint over her tongue as she kept up a rapid fire of comment and questions in French.

"But the grand duke, whom we honor tonight, he will need our good wishes, if he is to succeed," she exclaimed. "Is it not so, monsieur?"

"THESE are shaky days for crowns." Elton smiled. "But I have heard nothing of what the grand duke intends."

The countess shrugged and Elton thought there was mischief in her laugh.

"He will turn Russia to the Germans and restore a new order of the nobility," she explained gaily. "In no other way can Russia be saved from the rabble since that wretch Lenine has turned them to his own ends."

The smile swept from her face in a sudden change of humor.

"But, pardon, monsieur; I forgot that you are the American. Perhaps I should not speak so of German successes."

"As an American," said Elton politely, "naturally my thoughts are for my own country. But while in neutral Switzerland, I must remember to keep them pretty much to myself."

"Ah, and of the Americans I have heard the amusing scandal," she chattered. "I hear it said in Geneva that the Americans are planning the first great battle of their new army—one that will seize a great German salient at St. Mihiel. Is that not true, monsieur?"

"The American generals have been very thoughtless." Elton laughed. "They have neglected to take me into their confidence as to their future plans. But Dame Rumor is always an interesting jade and knows many things, if we do not take them too seriously."

"But yes, monsieur," she rejoined, "and yet I have heard from this same Dame Rumor, who lives in Geneva, that the German staff have the orders of the American battle. Is that not most amusing, monsieur?"

There was no taunt in her voice. If she were baiting him, Elton vowed that she did it with an unmatched skill. She spoke with the vivacity, the lively abandon, of a woman who has had a bit too much champagne with her dinner.

"Rumors are always amusing, Comtesse de Coudrée," he replied. "But it would hardly be amusing if true, at least not to me, an American."

"Monsieur has the sense of humor, yes?" she demanded. "Then we will find amusement when he learns that the Germans, on the days before the great battle, withdraw their armies from St. Mihiel and leave the American generals to fight deserted windmills—like our old friend Don Quixote!"

"Very amusing, that," said Elton. "But the Germans hardly would play such a joke at the expense of a defeat."

"The world very much needs to laugh, monsieur. If the German armies should make the Americans ridiculous, would it not be worth more than the battle? The great laugh, monsieur, sometimes it is worse than the great defeat, yes and more cruel! It destroys the confidence."

"I fear, Comtesse," said Elton, "that we are drifting away from things we are supposed to talk about here in Switzerland."

"Among friends?" she rebuked him. "Then will we speak of Russia, which is no longer fish nor fowl."

"Of Russia I know very little," he replied noncommittally.

The countess sobered.

"Poor Russia," she sighed. "I am afraid, monsieur, that I know so very little good news of Russia now."

They arrived shortly at the château and disembarked into the count's elevator apartment, which set them afoot at the great reception hall. Elton dismissed conjecture as they entered the place. If there were some new mischief afoot it would develop soon enough, he thought. But as the evening wore on he found himself still at sea. There were no symptoms, no suspicious asides, no hint of hidden entanglements. The grand duke's farewell reception was informal; a presentation followed by dancing, chatting and drinking on the count's vine bowered terraces. There were fewer guests than before, perhaps not more than a hundred, and fewer uniforms. Count Kulm appeared only briefly, Elton catching a momentary glimpse of him as he crossed through the reception room with the grand duke's party.

Señora Quarazza was among those present, having in tow an elderly attaché in Mexican uniform. Elton saw the Spanish adventuress was weaving a new diplomatic web in which her latest victim already floundered helplessly. The Comtesse de Coudrée no longer talked without restraint. She made herself agreeable to Elton, but in an impersonal sort of way, keeping him on the terrace most of the evening to listen to the concert of Hungarian rhapsodies played by one of the orchestras. Za and Mademoiselle Le Rivet left them soon after reaching the château and he saw nothing further of the two.

By midnight, when the guests were leaving, he had all but concluded that his first discarded surmise was correct after all. He must have been brought here for no immediate purpose, or at most for the secret scrutiny of visiting German agents, an appraisal by expert German eyes.

He was waiting for the countess to join him at the elevator, ready to return to Geneva, when one of the gilded functionaries of the château approached with a solemn bow.

"A request for the presence of monsieur," said the servant in English.

"But I'm about to leave the château for my hotel," said Elton. "Who is it wants me, and for what?"

"The gentleman do not explain," replied the functionary, "but he is the distinguish guest of the château and wish the few words with monsieur, please."

Elton followed the fellow through the

château, up a flight of stairs at the rear and brought up before a closed door.

"If monsieur will please knock—the gentleman he is waiting within," said the servant, and turned away.

At his knock a man's voice in French bade him enter. The man, sole occupant of a large lounging room, was seated on a divan at the far wall, his arms folded high on his chest, his head well forward, eyes fixed upon Elton from under lowering brows.

"Monsieur will have a seat," he commanded in a low, vibrant voice.

IT WAS not until he had seated himself that recognition swept into Elton's brain. The man he had seen but once, for an instant, but whose face was stamped indelibly in his memory—Vladimir Lomonosoff, the Russian who was to kill Count Kulm. Elton held himself under perfect control as he returned the other's gaze.

"So that you may know, monsieur, with whom you deal," said the Russian in a voice that was filled with some inexplicable passion, "I am the Monsieur Vladimir Lomonosoff."

Elton made no reply. He merely continued to look placidly at the Russian, wondering at the enigma behind this meeting. He saw now that the Russian's passion was something sinister, vindictive, a storm held firmly in check.

"The name it is familiar to your ears, monsieur?" the Russian inquired with a sneer.

"Vladimir Lomonosoff," repeated Elton. "Lomonosoff, the name is not unfamiliar."

"Then you can guess why I have sent for you, monsieur!"

"At the instance, perhaps, of Monsieur Lareaux of Berne?" Elton insinuated in a guarded voice.

The Russian ignored the reference. He leaned back against the wall and spoke with a leering smile.

"It is because, monsieur," he said, "in a moment I am going to shoot you through the heart!"

If there had been the slightest tremor in Elton's nerves it vanished now. Not by the twitching of a muscle did he receive this dire threat. His face remained a blank mask as he searched the Russian's face. Lomonosoff's eyes burned now with the fire of a devil. It came to Elton that the fellow was in deadly earnest, else a consummate actor.

"Will you please come to your point, whatever it is?" said Elton crisply. "Or are you temporarily out of your mind?"

"You are impatient, monsieur?" sneered Lomonosoff. "Very well; we shall not delay the drilling of your treacherous heart!"

Very deliberately the Russian produced a German pistol from a humidor that stood beside the divan, and slowly raised it. Elton's muscles tightened as he observed the threat, his alert mind taking in every detail; the long barreled German military pistol upon which had been fitted a special sporting sight, the tense grip of the Russian's hand upon the stock, the growing surge of the passion in Lomonosoff's twisted face.

The scene that followed was a swift moving, blurring panorama before Elton's eyes. With a quick movement the Russian raised the muzzle of the pistol in a line with Elton's heart and pulled the trigger. There was a metallic snap, the beating of the striker pin upon a defective cartridge. He saw Lomonosoff cast a startled look at the weapon, and before the Russian could level it again, Elton had lunged across the room and closed with him.

Lomonosoff was a man of wiry strength, muscles hardened to steel against the exigencies of the Czarist secret police, skilled in the grapple. He shook Elton off, but not for long enough to level his pistol. Elton got one hand at the Russian's throat, the other at the wrist of his pistol hand. But again Lomonosoff's strength prevailed. The corded muscles of his neck were proof against the steely grip of Elton's fingers. The Russian's right hand twisted itself slowly free.

As the fellow released his wrist, Elton

met him with a trick that must have been no part of the Czarist's fighting curricula. Without stepping back, he swung a short hook to the Russian's jaw. The blow missed the jaw but caught Lomonosoff over the eye, blinding him for an instant and filling him with fury. Elton struck a second blow, a half swing from short range, that sent his antagonist staggering against the wall.

Before Lomonosoff could recover his senses, Elton had wrenched the weapon from his hand. The Russian drove blindly and reached for a cutlass, one of a sheaf of military ornaments that hung on Von Kulm's wall.

"I have the advantage now, monsieur!" Elton warned him, pointing the captured weapon. "If you provoke me further, I'll use it."

The door swung open. Elton was conscious of excitement, people entering. What followed was a blur. A sharp explosion rang in his ears. He saw Lomonosoff snap erect, half turn on his toes, sag slowly at the knees and then collapse in a heap. Even in the terrific tension of the instant he wondered why the Russian had been shot down. Or was this all pantomime? He turned to face Za, a look of horror on the fellow's face. A score of faces filled the door and the hallway.

Za went to the prostrate figure and turned Lomonosoff on his back. He felt briefly of his heart and then rose to face Elton.

"What is the meaning, monsieur, of this act?" Za inquired coolly. "Monsieur Lomonosoff, he is dead."

Elton stooped over the fallen Russian. Even though the man's face was the face of death, he felt of the heart. It had stopped beating. The tragedy before his eyes was not pantomime. Lomonosoff had been shot dead.

"I was well enough able to defend myself," Elton said calmly. "I can not understand why he was shot down."

Za's face twisted in an expression of bewilderment.

"But who, if not monsieur the American, fire the shot that kill?" he demanded. "As I open the door, to learn what mad quarrel disturb the château of his Excellency, I see the spurt of fire, and Monsieur Lomonosoff fall dead."

"This pistol," said Elton, extending the weapon, "has not been fired. Lomonosoff attempted to shoot me, but it missed fire, and I wrested it out of his hand."

Za gave an expressive gesture, an order to one of those at the door to examine the pistol. Elton surrendered it to a tall man of Teutonic features. But there was a measure of reassurance in those who had now entered the room. Among them were several in the uniforms of neutral attachés. The tall man removed the magazine from the pistol and counted the shells.

"One cartridge missing, monsieur," he informed Za. He stooped to the floor and picked up an empty cartridge. "Ah, the missing shell!" he exclaimed.

"The evidence most conclusive," snapped Za. "It is the murder, a matter for the gendarmes of Geneva. If monsieur have any explanation, it is perhaps wise that he reserve it for the Swiss magistrates."

A commotion at the door announced the arrival of some one in authority. Even Za stepped back and stood rigid, the others in the room fading to the walls. Elton saw the cold, relentless face and bristling figure of Von Kulm.

Von Kulm looked neither at Za nor at the body of the dead man.

"A serious matter," he said sharply. His eyes were fixed upon Elton. "An accident, perhaps?"

He turned and delivered himself in a crisp voice: "My guests will make no mention of this event. I will investigate and act according to the facts."

He turned to one of the aides.

"Monsieur Elton is to remain a prisoner of my château," he commanded. "See that he is properly secured, and in the morning you will bring him to me."

TO BE CONCLUDED

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

MORE about mighty Sir Samuel, famed African hunter.

Visalia, California

Here's a little handful of greasewood for the Camp-Fire. Throw it on to light up what Gordon MacCreagh had to say about my old (book-) friend, Sir Samuel Baker.

Sir Samuel was not only large and strong, but he was some sport; he shot charging elephants by waiting until they were within six yards—not six hundred—until he proved to himself that African elephants could not be safely killed in that way. Too bone-headed. He then changed his tactics and maneuvered to get close behind them, ten to fifteen feet; then he would attract their attention and shoot them in the temple as they swung their heads to see what was behind.

Sir Samuel went hunting fully equipped. On one hunt he took five double rifles, three single rifles and two shotguns along for his own use. For the shotguns he carried four hundred pounds of assorted shot. One of his single rifles, "The Baby," he fails to describe as to size and weight but states several times that its charge was 12 drachms of powder (black, of course) and an explosive bullet that weighed a half pound.

THIS description by Sir Samuel doubles MacCreagh's ante as to weight of projecticle. This load—and gun—was shot from the shoulder, although Sir Sam admits that the recoil "spun me around" and that some time had to elapse before he was fit to make another shot with a reserve gun.

His 8-gauge rifles used 875 grain round bullets, but he usually shot conical balls probably weighing one-

third more. His 10-gauge rifles (round ball 700 grains) he seems to have shot exclusively with conical bullets and a powder charge of 7 dr. (191.5 gr.) —a real man-sized load in a fourteen pound double gun. Some at the Camp-Fire may remember the old low-gauge double gun of my boyhood, with its load of 4 dr. black powder and 1¼ oz. of No. 4's, and the resulting "push back."

BAKER to secure penetration hardened his bullets with mercury. In one "short 10-gauge double rifle" he used a 3 oz. (1312½ gr.) steel tipped bullet in front of 6 dr. (164 gr.) of powder. Note the difference: Baker hardened his pure lead slugs to secure penetration; today we, with our small-bores, soften the points to secure expansion.

The mixing of powder by Sir Samuel is perfectly plain. He used black powder only; no smokeless was on the market. As he increased the weight of projectile he slowed up its rate of burning by using a coarser grain—slower burning. By a mixture of coarse and fine powder he secured something resembling our "progressive" powder of recent (?) invention.

IN ANOTHER column of the same issue of *Adventure* I see a letter from Cody Blake of Brooklyn. Blake knows guns and the West, but if you want real information, get Donegan Wiggins to relate his experiences. He will take you through Dodge City and all points west in their wildest and worst days, and he's the only man I know who can operate a trombone rifle so rapidly that the bullets don't go out of the barrel—they explode about his ears, thrown out before the priming can communicate with the powder.—G. L. CHESTER

ONE of you recently put some questions to Captain Townsend of A. A. about Custer and the battle of the Little Big Horn. From the number of letters since received from readers, both offering new information and asking it, it seems that this perennial topic for controversy will have to be given further airing. However, I hasten to add that I print the following only to correct a minor slip appearing in this section.

Williamson, West Virginia

Have just finished reading your replies on "Custer's Last Stand," published in *Adventure*. I am interested from a military and well as an historical standpoint, and would like to know from what source of information you base your reply to the question, "Did Custer wear his hair long at the battle of the Little Big Horn?" Your answer being yes.

In the narrative of Chief Red Horse, a Sioux Indian, he says that he saw two officers who had long yellow hair and both officers looked alike. This is the only article that I have read that makes such a statement. Most articles on the battle make the statement that Custer had his hair cut short during the campaign of 1876, and this was verified by Mrs. Custer.

DURING the commemoration at the battlefield in 1926, the press carried statements to the effect that the standard of the 7th cavalry was returned to them at that time. There must have been some reason for such a story. Will you kindly enlighten me on this matter?

There are others, I believe, who would like to know your source of information for the answer to the question concerning Custer's hair.

—ROBERT A. LUSK
(1ST LT. CAV., O. R. C.)

Captain Townsend's reply:

Sayner, Wisconsin

Your point with reference to General Custer's hair is well taken. General Custer cut his hair in compliance with War Department orders in the spring of 1876. The War Department had issued orders that all officers should wear short hair and many felt that this was directed more or less against General Custer.

I had this information when I wrote the letter in *Adventure*, but through some mental slip hard to explain I made the error you caught. Colonel W. A. Graham, the author of "The Story of the Little Big Horn," also caught me up and you may be interested in the following statement in Colonel Graham's letter to me:

"Custer had his golden curls shorn and his photograph taken during the spring of 1876, while he was in New York, and one of the New York papers—the *Graphic* as I remember it—published this picture at the time in connection with his appearance as a witness in the Belknap impeachment case. So when he took the field for his last campaign, his hair was short. This was one of the reasons that the Indians did not recognize him. It is a fact, not generally known, that the Sioux did not discover for some time after the battle, that it was 'Long Hair' they had met and conquered."

With reference to the statement about the loss of colors I think I am correct. I did not see the press reference you speak of and can not explain it. Please note however that my letter referred to the loss of colors as a regimental punishment—not the physical loss of the colors in battle.

—CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND

Mr. Thomas T. Hoopes, who contributed a bit about chain mail in the last Camp-Fire, says a few words on the subject of crossbows.

New York City

In a recent issue of your periodical there appears, in the "Ask Adventure" column, a query on the construction of crossbows.

May I point out that, in the standard reference work on the subject ("The Book of the Crossbow" by Sir Ralph Payne-Gallwey) there are given complete instructions, with careful and detailed working drawings, for the reproduction of the principal mediæval types?

There are, it is true, a number of minor errors in this book. The type of bowstring for the windlass type crossbow is incorrectly shown; if your correspondent gets so far in his reconstruction and desires it, I shall be glad to prepare for him a drawing of the construction of the string.

The peep sight did not come into general use on crossbows until the seventeenth century, but I doubt if the crossbow was ever "aimed after the manner of a shotgun, depending on guesswork for elevation, etc." The aim was taken from the knuckle of the right thumb to the tip of the arrow in its rest, the position of the thumb being altered slightly according to the elevation desired. The stock was sometimes notched to assist in retaining uniformity of aim by giving a uniform point-blank position for the thumb. Additional elevation notches were sometimes added.

—THOMAS T. HOOPES

Incidentally, while we're on the subject of bows, the following communication from Earl B. Powell, archery expert for "Ask Adventure," may be of interest:

Los Angeles, Cal.

I am enclosing a letter commenting on one of my letters appearing in "Ask Adventure" recently, which opens up the subject of the blowgun. While this weapon is not much in my line, yet, I learned the construction and use of it when a boy from an old man who told me that he learned from the Indians back in Alabama.

His guns were made of Southern native bamboo or cane, and sometimes of elder, and the arrows were made of cane about 12 inches long by ⅛ inch in diameter with the end widened and sharpened, then toasted in the fire. I have seen him pin a rat to a pine log in a corn crib driving the arrows through Mr. Rat thirty to forty feet away. One of his stunts was to put a grape on the end of a stake and puncture it at distances unbelievable. He also used clay balls dried in the sun and baked in the fire, and these would kill birds as large as a blackbird readily, especially if from head shots.

IT IS hard to conceive the remarkable accuracy that may be obtained from the simple eight or ten foot tube of cane or elder. Apparently the thing automatically centers itself much on the principle of the peep sight.

I used to make the guns as described in the letter enclosed, and also made them with a thin tube of brass about 7/16 inside diameter, and it was my custom to sit in the corn cribs waiting, and woe betide the luckless mouse that dared play when I was around. The same tactics were used with a crossbow, as the movement necessary to draw a long bow would frighten the little pests.

I can find no record of the North American Indians ever using poisoned darts either on game or enemies, and with one or two exceptions none of them used poisoned arrows of any kind. The red man apparently left it to the Spanish *ballastero* (crossbowman) to use poisoned arrows, for which purpose a plentiful supply of hellebore was raised.

—EARL B. POWELL

Here is the reader's letter to Mr. Powell:

Best, Texas

Several times there have been queries in "A. A." about blowguns, and I have had an itch to tell my story, but have always been too lazy. I have only visited one part of the world where the *servatana* was still actually used. This was in the mountains of Oaxaca, well to the north and in the vicinity of the town Huahuapam de Leon. Thirty years ago the *servatana* was still standard equipment and was found in every home.

Every native carpenter then had some pieces of wood overhead in his shop getting seasoned for this purpose. The procedure for making was as follows: The plank was about four meters in length, and about the dimensions of a 2 x 4. I do not know what the wood would be called in English, except that I have seen a few made of cedar.

This stock is carefully planed and jointed; then a canal about 12 mm. half round is cut the entire length of the stock. The tool used for this was a special plane called a *vaquetero* and cut a correct half circle.

The piece was then sawed in two in the middle, and correctly faced one piece over the other. It was glued with a powerful and climate resisting cement made of wheat flour. I can tell you how it is made, but perhaps casein glue would be all right. After gluing the arm is dressed down to suitable dimensions and made round and tapering. The mouth end is left about the size of a silver dollar and slightly hollowed for the lips. The muzzle is brought to a diameter of about the size of a fifty cent piece.

THE bore is polished by passing a stout cord through and tieing the ends tight on each side of the shop or between two trees. Rags are wound on the cord and sprinkled with some mild abrasive and the gun slipped back and forth till all the bore is slick and smooth. Afterward the bore is polished with graphite. The outside is then wound with a spiral cloth bandage well soaked in glue. When dry it is painted green (I never saw any other color used) and varnished.

The finished length is about 2 meters or a little less.

The ammunition used was of various kinds. One of the most effective was made of little scraps of deerskin with a shingle nail (2″) stuck through. The hair is trimmed with scissors and makes an effective air stop. These can be shot into soft wood so hard

that it needs a claw hammer to pull them out.

Another favorite was a little cone made of paper rolled up, with a little ball of mud in the point. The mud ball a little smaller than the bore of the gun. The paper makes an air seal. These will kill a rabbit (sometimes).

Perhaps all this is old stuff to you, and if so beg pardon for taking up your time, but if it should be of any interest I could get one of those native carpenters to make and send us one or two specimens of their work. Could they go through the mail? I don't know.—ARTURO MACEWEN

A GOOD letter—one of several—commenting on "Aces," Robert Carse's recent story of the New York police.

Liberty, N. Y.

I wish to add my voice to the number you will undoubtedly hear concerning Robert Carse's story, entitled "Aces" in the June 1st *Adventure*. Mr. Carse wrote an entertaining tale but missed perfection.

I assume that a lot of your readers are adults and not children entering their teens. If so they will reject the impression R. C. seeks to convey concerning the application of third degree methods by the police. Individuals do not take unnecessary risks and this is true even of policemen, even a red headed Irish one.

Therefore the spectacle of the red headed *Sean O'Drohin* locking himself in a room alone with an unhandcuffed prisoner every bit as big as he and battering a confession out of him is too much for adult consumption. Likewise the pint sized *Fabio Ruigi* fighting to a standstill a great bull of a man like *S. O'D.* It is very easy to maim a man very seriously in such an altercation and no one knows this better than the police officer.

THERE is safety in numbers. A truer picture of the third degree application would have been obtained if R. C. had had a half dozen or more officers use that prisoner as a combination football and punching bag.

Whether such a course would have had the desired result is debatable. I do not believe a confession of wrongdoing can be forced out of a suspected criminal by simply battering him into a semi-conscious state. There are other third degree methods more refined, but plenty annoying, which are more efficacious. Perhaps R. C. knows of these, but he does not bring them out, which leads me to suspect that he wished to glorify a red headed Irish cop.

The public prints have lately reported the finding of the wire-bound body of a murdered young woman floating in the waters of the Metropolitan district. Would R. C. solve this crime by putting a suspicious character through the *Sean O'Drohin* confessional?

SINCE R. C's. criminals were Italians, it would have been in better taste if his hero had been an Italian police officer (remember Petrosino?); or since his hero was Irish, then his criminal might have been Irish also. The Irish representation among our criminals is just as prominent as that of any other European national group.

I do not agree with R. C's assertion in the story that third degree methods were necessary in those days and that their use prevented crime. This is refuted by the known increasing need of more police. These methods are a relic of barbarism and should have no place in the crime detection of of civilized peoples. Their use is fostered by downright incompetence in the solving of crime mysteries by the *S. O'Ds* entrusted with this work. This view concerning incompetence is held by the criminals themselves, in support of which statement I quote an individual long a prominent character in the criminal news to the effect that the average detective employed by a certain municipality "could not detect a horseshoe in a plate of hash."

IF CROOKED politicians are to blame for lax treatment of convicted criminals, then obviously the detectives' job is to get after the crooked politicians. In this he would have the support of the honest politicians. Or are we to assume there are no honest politicians? I prefer to believe the former.

European detective forces do not use the American third degree. Yet we have more unsolved crime mysteries than they. The answer to this riddle lies in the European use of scientific methods of crime detection, as testified to by Joseph Gollomb in several of his books, and also by a New York newspaper.

CONCERNING R. C's belief that third degree methods are less existent today let me recall to you the unsuccessful efforts of a prominent Brooklyn criminal lawyer to have photographs made of the naked body of his client, a Norwegian accused of hacking to death three women. This was a couple of years ago. Or the explanation offered after his capture by the young Negro slayer of two detectives. He had been picked up by the detectives and was being taken to the station house. Unfortunately he had not been searched properly and therefore had in his possession a loaded revolver. The two detectives were shot down and died later, leaving large families. After his capture the Negro explained that he had not done anything but was being taken in for questioning. This, he stated, simply meant that he was to be knocked and kicked around in the privacy of the station house. He had been through that before and did not want to go through it again. The third degree actually caused the murder of these two detectives.

You may gather from this letter that I am prejudiced against policemen. I am not. I am for law and order. I am merely prejudiced in favor of intelligence in the solving of crime problems and

against the unsportsmanlike brutalizing of sometimes innocent individuals in the privacy of station houses. —A. GEORGE

It is easy to concur with Comrade George in his doubts as to the efficacy of the third degree; rather harder to agree with him that Mr. Carse or any other author should choose his material for fiction with any other view than that of fulfilling the needs of his particular story.

Speaking of the third degree, it has, of course, long been a sore spot in police administration. There are police officials who deny that it is used, or ever has been used, within their knowledge. Yet there is doubtless plenty of evidence that its employment, in one form or another, has been much more general than most people care to believe.

Whether or not scientific methods of apprehending felons are appreciably more advanced abroad than in this country is a question. As a nation we are not much inclined to be backward in scientific research and development. That the European police—especially those of such great cosmopolitan cities as London, Paris and Vienna—catch the criminal more often than our officers in New York and Chicago is a fact implicit in the records.

What's the answer? Some say graft and corruption. Others, glaring inefficiency. If either or both explain this deplorable situation, it is difficult to see how the third degree may be an effective instrument in solving crimes, though it may occasionally wring confessions, true or false. If the really important criminal, the hardened, repeating offender, is beyond the law because of his underworld power and the cash to buy immunity, just how much is the third degree worth? And if the fault lies in police inefficiency, can one expect improvement in the continued use of such a left-handed, extra-legal and brutal makeshift? This one may be pardoned for doubting strenuously.

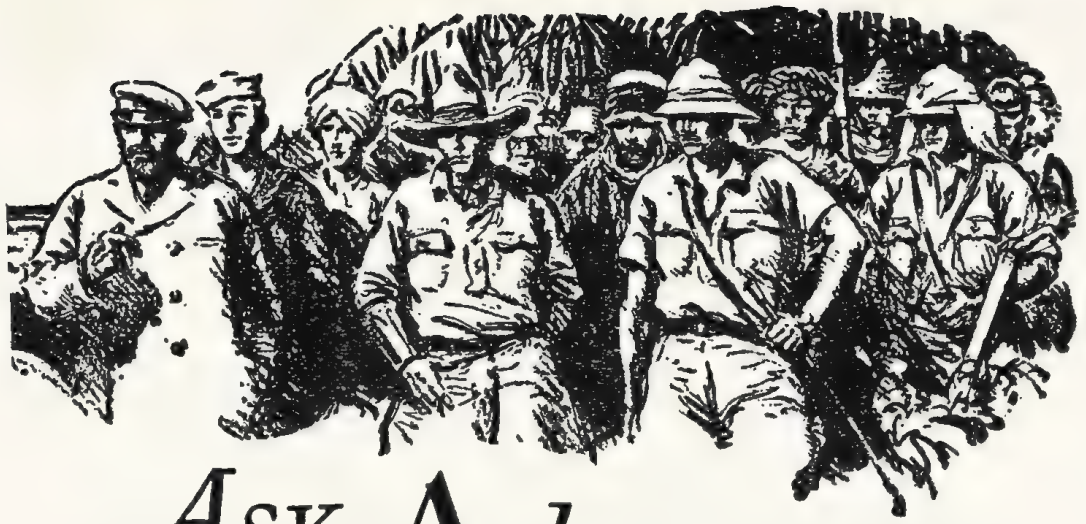
The third degree may make splendid dramatic material for fiction. It is sadly out of date in fact.

—A. A. P.

OUR Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The spirit of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There are no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.



Ask Adventure

For free information and services you can't get elsewhere

Ontario

THE possibility of harvesting the marshes.

Request:—"Can you tell me if in your section of Ontario there are any large marshes grown with flag? This flag is sometimes called cat-tails or bullrushes. I am anxious to find a marsh where there would be a thousand acres or more as near a railway as possible, or near a fair road leading to a railway.

There is a marsh in Hamilton, but the water was very high there last year and I had difficulty in getting the flag to shore."

—R. K. WILSON, Rochester, New York

Reply, by A. D. L. Robinson: — Had you asked for the location of marshes of less acreage, I might have been able to direct you to several. At Point Pelee, in Essex County, there are large marshes and I think I have seen the iris growing there. Hundreds of acres in that marsh, if not the thousand you ask for. Then at Holland Landing, near the C. N. R., there must be more than a thousand acres of marsh, but these are being reclaimed and farmed. However, there is a lot of marsh left. If I knew just for what purpose you want such a marsh, I might be able to give you more locations. I do know of one with much less acreage which, in June, is a riot of purple bloom of the flag or iris. That is near Orillia, Ontario. Those are the most wonderful iris beds I have ever seen—thick and quite easily accessible. All along the lake are such beds. Then again, at river mouths on the Georgian Bay are many marshes, but not so easily accessible. Again, at Port Rowan and Oshawa are large marshes, but I can not say if iris grows or not. But those are being diverted to muskrat farms. If you don't mind a correction just here: The so-called cat-tails or bullrushes are not the same plant as the iris or flag. The purple, wild iris never grows as high as the cat-tails.

Further details on bullrushes.

Request:—"I am in receipt of your letter of April 17th and I thank you very kindly for the information contained therein. As soon as I can get away for a few days I will drive over to see the marshes you mention.

My reason for saying thousands of acres is that small marshes usually run to iris and cat-tails, whereas the flag that I use would most likely be found somewhere in a large marsh.

I used the common names for the flag, as there are some eight hundred and seventy-five species of iris.

The stinking iris (Iris foetidissima) is a species with livid purple flowers and ill smelling leaves.

The flag I am trying to locate is plain Typha.

The cat-tail is properly named Typha latifolia.

Quoting International Encyclopaedia, Flag: 'A popular name for many Monocatyledonous plants with sword shaped leaves mostly growing in moist situations. It is sometimes particularly appropriated to species of Genus Iris or Flower-de-luce; but is also given indiscriminately to plants of similar foliage, as the sweet flag (Acorus calamus) and the

cat-tail reed Typha also called Reed Mace. The latter, which is commoner, is sometimes called Bullrush.'

During the summer I harvest the plain Typha and it is sold to persons making mats and chair seats. There are nine species of plain Typha, and only experience can tell the best flag for the purpose it is to be used for.

Reply, by A. D. L. Robinson:—Though you did not request a reply to your letter, I feel that a reply is due you, if only to confirm my statement contained in my former letter that I think what you want is to be found in the marshes of which I wrote you, *viz*, north of Orillia, Ont., on Lake Couchiching—about 85 miles north of Toronto. I note that you are really a botanist, and know whereof you write. I think it is really the sweet flag which grows in such profusion in the places I mentioned, and not the Iris foetidissima. At least, I know this flag *smells* sweet and does not carry a disagreeable odor. But it certainly *has* purple blooms. For the Typha latifolia, I feel almost certain it is that which lines the mile of shore near Orillia. And up the creek which flows into Lake Couchiching. The banks on both sides are clotted with what we have always called cat-tails and which resemble the drawing you have made. I have always thought those should have a commercial value. I should be sorry to send you on a wild goose errand, but I feel that what you want is there, hence this extra letter. And in paying quantities. However, it may not be to your disadvantage to come there and "spy out the land". Among these cat-tails is another kind of rush or reed, round and about an eighth to a quarter of an inch thick. Two bays there are choked with those.

Convict Ship

THE old *Success*, an exhibit of eighteenth century shipbuilding—and once the terror of felons.

Request:—"Kindly let me know something about the history of the convict vessel which is moored at the dock here in this city. How old is it? And anything else you might know about it."

—LARRY MASON, Washington, D. C.

Reply, by Lieut. Harry E. Rieseberg:—Her name is *Success*, and she was built of teakwood in 1790 in Burma, and is said to be the oldest vessel afloat in the world today. Her career has been very picturesque, having been built as a part of the great fleet of East India merchantmen which carried spices, silks and incense from the East to Europe, before going into service as a convict ship.

An interesting feature of the vessel is the original teakwood mainmast, bearing the mark of a pirate cannon ball fired in 1800. In 1802 the ship was withdrawn from the merchant trade and became the flagship of the British Felon Fleet, remaining in this grim business until 1851, when she became a permanent receiving prison ship, anchored off Melbourne, Australia. During the period she was operating in this fleet she became the most famous of all engaged in the carrying of men, women and children to imprisonment in Australia.

She was sunk in 1885, five years later raised, and has since been touring the world as an exhibit, having during this time been visited by more than 21,000,000 people.

Galapagos

THEY are pleasant islands, but hardly a land of opportunity.

Request:—"1. Can you give me any information about the Galapagos Islands? To which country do they belong?

2. Is there any regular steamship service to the islands and, if so, from what port?

3. How are the climate, soil and opportunities in agriculture?"—JOHN WARREN, Prince George, British Columbia

Reply, by Mr. Edgar Young:—1. The Galapagos Islands, meaning Tortoise Islands, from the huge land turtles now almost extinct which inhabited the islands on their discovery by the Spaniards, are situated about 600 miles directly off Ecuador, on the equator, and belong to the piece-of-pie republic, Ecuador. The Galapagos group consist of 16 islands and several unnamed rocky islets scattered among them. The larger of them have two names, one English and one Spanish. However, only two—Chatham and Albemarle—may be said to be inhabited. They are all of volcanic origin, the principal ones being mountainous, with old craters still showing, but none active.

I believe if I remember right that one did show a bit of activity a few years back. The general topography is craters, lava rock, and in places fertile areas, principally on the southern and eastern sides where the islands receive the benefit of moisture laden trade winds. The climate is tropical but tempered by the northward flowing Humboldt current which sweeps through the group. The rainy season is from January to May, and this is the hot season.

Most of the islands suffer from lack of water, but the largest of them have springs and small streams. The porous nature of the soil rapidly drains off surplus water. After the rains the craters are partly filled with water but soon become dry from seepage. In the inhabited areas water is obtained from artesian wells and in certain uplands of some of the islands there is perpetual water. Albemarle island is about 1,650 sq. mi. in extent; Indefatigable about 390; Narborough 250; James 200, and this island has the largest trees found in the group; Chatham about 150 sq. mi. Originally a convict settlement, it has a fixed population of about five to six hundred. There is a governor in charge. Cattle and agriculture are the principal occupations.

2. No regular steamer service. When I was in Guayaquil there was a fishing boat (Swedish) that

made monthly trips, also a government boat that made periodical trips from Guayaquil.

3. Climate is almost ideal at times. The soil, where there is any, is decomposed lava rock and volcanic ash with a bit of humus. This is fine soil if water can be put on it. It is excellent coffee ground. They are good islands for *dolce far niente*, for Robinson Crusoing, for lotus eating, but I doubt if a man could make money working over there.

Motor Boat

A FREQUENT question: How can an old automobile motor be installed in a boat?

Request:—"I have built a motor boat 30 feet long and am a little uncertain about the motor. The boat is built of white oak and planked with 1-inch cypress dressed. Can you tell me if the Star motor I have will push it. It is a 4-cylinder motor, taxed at 18-horsepower. It is a very snappy little motor and I hope it will do. If you think so, what size propeller would you suggest?"

—MARION S. ROBERTS, Elkton, Maryland

Reply, by Mr. Gerald T. White:—From your description I do not believe that your boat is particularly easy to drive, but you may be able to get a speed as high as 8 miles an hour from the Star motor, providing it is in good condition.

No automobile motor will give the utmost in service in a boat unless it has been rebuilt for marine service. Such rebuilding usually involves changing the oiling system so the cylinders will get plenty of lubrication, even though the engine is set on a slant. Another change is to fit a waterjacketed manifold for the exhaust. In a car the hot pipe leads beneath the chassis where the heat is not annoying. In a boat the same pipe would get red hot and prove a source of danger. All, or part, of the exhaust water may be turned into the pipe to cut down the heat, but this can not be done very close to the cylinders on account of the danger of the water backing up into the valve chamber. Therefore the pipe gets very hot between the exhaust valve and the point where the cooling water enters.

The propeller advised is one with three blades, 14 inches in diameter and 12 inches in pitch. If your engine is in good shape it should turn this wheel at 1500 revolutions per minute.

Coin

THE date stamp at the mint has not always been correct.

Request:—"What is the reason for the scarcity of the 1804 Silver Dollar? I have heard many, among them the one that the whole mint for that year, with the exception of a few coins, was lost at sea while on its way to Tripoli, to pay ransoms. Is this so? If not, what is the true reason?

How many of the 1913 Liberty Head nickels were minted before the buffalo came out? Why is such a high price offered for one?"

—SPENCER COLEMAN, Athens, Georgia

Reply, by Mr. Howland Wood:—The reason for the scarcity of the 1804 dollar is due to the fact that none were made in that year bearing the date 1804. It was not an unusual practise for our mint, in those days, to use dies of other years until they were used up. The mint records show that a large number of dollars were made in 1804, but they were probably made from 1802 and '03 dies. In fact, the records show that dollars were made during the next two or three years, but no examples have come down to us bearing the dates of 1805 and '06. The few dollars that bear the date 1804 were undoubtedly struck about 1840, and in subsequent years, up to 1877, for collectors on demand, from a die dated 1804 that was in the mint.

As far as I have been able to learn, no 1913 Liberty Head nickels were made with official sanction. It is said that there are six in existence, all of which were held by one man at one time for speculation. I have never seen one nor have I met any one who has.

Dog Team

A HALF BRED wolf dog is a good worker with a bad temper.

Request:—"1. What breed of dog is used the most for dog team work?

2. How many dogs are there in the mail teams?

3. About how many miles a day can a good team average?

4. What is the price of a good team?

5. Of what materials are the sleds constructed?

6. What is the cost of a sled?

7. What do the drivers feed the dogs while they are on the trail?

8. In what manner are the dogs hitched together?

9. What is the lowest temperature at which a team can safely travel?"

—BILL REESE, Magna, Utah

Reply, by Mr. Victor Shaw:—1. In Alaska we use malemutes, Siberians, wolf dogs, or any large, big boned, strong dog, or breed.

2. Teams used for passenger, mail and other light service consist of 8 to 10 animals, depending upon personality of driver.

3. Hard to answer as to how many miles a good team can average in a day, because it depends largely upon what the going may be. On a hard surface it is so much faster than upon softer going. An 8-dog team on sea ice will travel 100 miles a day easily with one passenger, on a medium weight sledge. In soft snow a 12-dog team will have trouble in rough country making ten miles in one day, with any sort of load such as heavy mail bags; and if the snow is wet, even less.

4. You can get good malemute stock pups at about $25 each.

5, 6. Sledges are built of some light tough wood such as ash or hickory. The cost is not excessive, if you build it yourself. In localities where all material must be imported, with perhaps high freight and other costs laid down, it might reach to anything from $50 to $100.

7. Drivers in Alaska feed frozen fish on the trail, or any meat they may chance to kill *en route*. A half bred wolf dog is as good as any animal for work, but his temper is likely to be uncertain and he is apt to cause more trouble.

8. In all timber country dog teams are hooked tandem—one animal before the other, the harness in one place, with a lead dog, and a wheeler next the sledge. Less easily managed dogs between. In the Arctic, say in northern Greenland, where there are no obstacles to prevent, the Eskimos hitch their teams fan-wise, each dog having a separate trace to sledge, each animal also hooked with a different length trace, the lead-dog trace being longest. This to prevent fighting as much as possible.

9. Dogs work in any temperature a man can travel. Have to watch their pads though and cut out balled snow between toes. They sleep under snow at night, letting it drift over their beds.

Our Experts—They have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

They will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assume any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible.

1. **Service**—It is free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached*, are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. Be sure that the issuing office stamps the coupon in the left-hand circle.

2. **Where to Send**—Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. DO NOT send questions to this magazine.

3. **Extent of Service**—No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.

4. **Be Definite**—Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.

Salt and Fresh Water Fishing *Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting; bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.*—JOHN B. THOMPSON ("Ozark Ripley"), care *Adventure.*

Small Boating *Skiff, outboard, small launch river and lake cruising.*—RAYMOND S. SPEARS, Inglewood, California.

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Motor Boating GERALD T. WHITE, 1055 Boulevard East, Weehawken, N. J.

Yachting A. R. KNAUER, 2722 E. 75th Place, Chicago, Ill.

Motor Camping JOHN D. LONG, 610 W. 116th St., New York City.

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Edged Weapons, *pole arms and armor.*—ROBERT E. GARDNER, 835 Gladden Road, Grandview, Columbus, Ohio.

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Hiking CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, M. D., American Medical Association, 535 N. Dearborn St., Chicago, Ill.

Camping and Woodcraft HORACE KEPHART, Bryson City, N. C.

Mining and Prospecting *Territory anywhere in North America. Questions on mines, mining, mining law, methods and practise; where and how to prospect; outfitting; development of prospect after discovery; general geology and mineralogy necessary for prospector or miner in any portion of territory named. Any question on any mineral, metallic or nonmetallic.* —VICTOR SHAW, Loring, Alaska.

Precious and Semi-precious Stones *Cutting and polishing of gem materials; principal sources of supply; technical information regarding physical characteristics, crystalography, color and chemical compositions.*—F. J. ESTERLIN, 210 Post St., San Francisco, Cal.

Forestry in the United States *Big-Game hunting, guides and equipment; national forests of the Rocky Mountain States. Questions on the policy of the Government regarding game and wild animal life in the forests.*—ERNEST W. SHAW, South Carver, Mass.

Tropical Forestry *Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.*—WILLIAM R. BARBOUR, Haitian Agricultural Corporation, Cap-Haitien, Haiti.

Railroading in the U. S., Mexico and Canada *General office, especially immigration, work; advertising work, duties of station agent, bill clerk, ticket agent, passenger brakeman and rate clerk. General Information.*—R. T. NEWMAN, P. O. Drawer 368, Anaconda, Mont.

Army Matters, United States and Foreign CAPTAIN GLEN R. TOWNSEND, Fort Snelling, Minn.

Navy Matters *Regulations, history, customs, drill, gunnery; tactical and strategic questions, ships, propulsion, construction, classification; general information. Questions regarding the enlisted personnel and officers except such as contained in the Register of Officers can not be answered. Maritime law.*—LIEUT. FRANCIS GREENE, U. S. N. R., 333 Fifty-fourth St., Brooklyn, N. Y.

U. S. Marine Corps CAPT. F. W. HOPKINS, 507 No. Harper, Hollywood, Cal.

Aviation *Airplanes; airships; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. Parachutes and gliders. No questions on stock promotion.*—LIEUTENANT JEFFREY R. STARKS, 1408 "N" Street, N. W., Washington, D. C.

State Police FRANCIS H. BENT, JR., care *Adventure.*

Royal Canadian Mounted Police PATRICK LEE, 3758 81st Street, Jackson Heights, New York City.

Horses *Care, breeding, training of horses in general; hunting, jumping, and polo; horses of the old and new West.* —THOMAS H. DAMERON, 7 Block "S", Pueblo, Colo.

Dogs JOHN B. THOMPSON, care *Adventure.*

American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal *Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Cal.

Taxidermy SETH BULLOCK, care *Adventure.*

Entomology *General information about insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects, etc.*—DR. S. W. FROST, Arendtsville, Pa.

Herpetology *General information on reptiles and amphibians; their habits and distribution.*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, American Museum of Natural History, New York, N. Y.

Ichthyology *Fishes and lower aquatic vertebrates.*—GEORGE S. MYERS, Stanford University, Box 821, Calif.

Stamps H. A. DAVIS. The American Philatelic Society, 3421 Colfax Ave., Denver, Colo.

Coins and Medals HOWLAND WOOD, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th St., New York City.

Radio *Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.*—DONALD MCNICOL, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J.

Photography *Information on outfitting and on work in out-of-the-way places. General information.*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, New Jersey.

Linguistics and Ethnology *(a) Racial and tribal tradition; folklore and mythology. (b) Languages and the problems of race migration. (c) Individual languages and language-families; interrelation of tongues.*—DR. NEVILLE WHYMANT, care of *Adventure.*

Old Songs That Men Have Sung ROBERT W. GORDON, care of *Adventure.*

Football JOHN B. FOSTER, American Sports Pub. Co., 45 Rose Street, New York City.

Baseball FREDERICK LIEB, *The New York Evening Post*, 75 West St., New York City.

Track JACKSON SCHOLZ, 73 Farmington Ave., Longmeadow, Mass.

Tennis FRED HAWTHORNE, Sports Dept., New York *Herald Tribune*, New York City.

Basketball I. S. ROSE, 321 Euclid Ave., Cleveland, Ohio.

Bicycling ARTHUR J. LEAMOND, 469 Valley St., South Orange, New Jersey.

Swimming LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 260 Washington St., N. Y. C.

Skating FRANK SCHREIBER, 2226 Clinton Ave., Berwyn, Ill.

Skiing and Snowshoeing W. H. PRICE, 3436 Mance St., Montreal, Quebec.

Hockey "Daniel," *The Evening Telegram*, 73 Dey St., New York City.

Archery EARL B. POWELL, 524 West 3rd St., Los Angeles, Cal.

Fencing CAPT. JOHN V. GROMBACH, 445 West 23rd St., New York City.

The Sea Part 1 *American Waters.* Also ships, seamen, shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, small boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America.—HARRY E. RIESEBERG, Apt. 504, 2115 F Street N. W., Washington, D. C.

The Sea Part 2 *Statistics and records of American shipping; names, tonnages, dimensions, service, crews, owners of all American documental steam, motor, sail, yacht and unrigged merchant vessels. Vessels lost, abandoned, sold to aliens and all Government owned vessels.*—HARRY E. RIESEBERG.

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The Sea Part 4 *Atlantic and Indian Oceans; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits; Islands and Coasts.* (See also West Indian Sections.)—CAPT. DINGLE, care *Adventure.*

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